

Tridentine Community News

May 21, 2006

The King of Instruments

This past Wednesday, May 17, a significant event took place in the history of St. Josaphat Parish: Fr. Mark and the Parish Pastoral Council approved a plan to replace the current organ at St. Josaphat with one more fitting for the edifice and the growing music program that takes place there. The current instrument is not the original organ. In 1966, because of water damage to the original instrument, then-pastor Fr. Francis Dolot purchased the present, smaller organ, used, from the First Baptist Church of Royal Oak.

Organ Terminology

In order to understand why a new organ is required, it is helpful to understand some basic terms:

Rank: A rank is a set of pipes.

Stop: A stop is a control for one or multiple ranks. Each stop produces a certain kind of sound. Names of stops range from the descriptive ("Trumpet") to the obscure ("Gamba"). The more stops an organ has, the more varied sounds it can make. Stops are usually controlled on the organ console by pull-knobs or rocker switches, as the accompanying photo illustrates.

Manual: A keyboard on the organ console. Organs have multiple keyboards to permit different stops to be associated with each keyboard. Different melodies or harmonies can thereby be played simultaneously with different sounds. Even the pedals are associated with stops. Dr. Norah Duncan from Blessed Sacrament Cathedral once performed a concert at which he played a portion of a piece usually meant for keyboard, entirely on the pedals. While most people think of pedals typically as providing bass sounds, they can also play higher notes, given the appropriate stop setting. A dexterous organist can make use of pedals in creative ways.

St. Josaphat's current organ has 13 ranks, 13 stops, and 2 manuals. By comparison, St. Joseph's organ has 37 ranks, 29 stops, and 2 manuals. Old St. Mary's has 72 ranks, 52 stops and 3 manuals. Our organ must keep pace with our developing music program, just as those parishes' did.

The Crux of the Problem

Many pieces cannot be played without a full complement of stops. Other pieces sound inappropriate when played on our organ, because it lacks sufficient volume to fill the building with sound. The present organ is almost always played at full

volume out of necessity, something which no organ is intended to endure. This creates a maintenance problem.

Examples of pieces which cannot be played on the present organ are Widor's Toccata in F (required stops are absent) and Vierne's *Messe Solennelle* (insufficient volume). We have been restricted in our choice of repertoire to those compositions which will not sound too weak when played on this instrument, such as the Charpentier *Messe de Minuit de Noël*. And majestic hymns sound tepid without the right stops.

A Realistic Solution

Brand-new pipe organs are out of consideration because of excessive cost. Electronic organs, which synthesize their sounds instead of blowing air through pipes, have little lasting value. It can be impossible to service a 20 year old electronic organ, because the electronic parts are no longer manufactured or available. In

contrast, pipe organs can be serviced almost indefinitely, because the underlying technology is relatively simple and does not change. And, of course, an electronic organ is totally out of character with our historic church.

An upgrade of the existing organ is not worthwhile. The ranks lack sufficient tonal quality. Our funds are more wisely spent starting over with a better, as well as larger, instrument.

A relatively economical and practical solution is purchasing an appropriate used organ, and retrofitting it into our space. Church closings across North America result in such instruments becoming available. The real challenge is in the reinstallation, the costliest part of the endeavor. A side benefit we hope to achieve is re-opening up the window of the Crucifixion, which the present organ blocks.

An Organ Committee has been formed to spearhead the project. The members are Wassim Sarweh (St. Josaphat music director), Matthew Meloche (St. Michael music director), Sean Dey (St. Joseph Parish Council), and Alex Begin (St. Josaphat Parish Council). We already have some committed donors. Should you know of any potential benefactors, please see someone from the Organ Committee or Fr. Mark. A fundraising campaign will begin shortly. Please consider setting aside some of your hard-earned dollars as we proceed to make a lasting improvement to our church *Ad Majorem Dei Gloriam*. You will be helping us and future generations give Our Lord the very best worship we can offer.

