

## **Selecting Our New Organ & Timeline**

*Fig Life Express*, July 2006 – Joel Martinson

As I write this article at the beginning of June, I have just completed two years as your Director of Music. Together we have made much music together in praise of our God during the services each week. We have a number of wonderful opportunities for celebration in the coming months, but instead of focusing on them, I would like to take this opportunity to update you on the project of our new pipe organ.

Many of you will remember the articles I wrote during the summer and fall of 2004 regarding our search for a permanent organ for our beautiful church. The current instrument, designed and voiced by Robert L. Sipe of Dallas and built during the last days of the Aeolian-Skinner Organ Company, was originally intended for temporary placement in the church. When funds were available to construct a chapel and a larger instrument, this organ would be relocated to the smaller worship space for which it was designed. Though it has served us well in the 35 years since 1971, its limited number of stops – only 13 – and lack of foundation and reed sounds makes it very difficult to provide much variety in services, to accompany most choral anthems, or to play a great deal of organ literature written for the church.

When I was called by Fr. Godwin to be your new Director of Music, he and I spoke of beginning an organ project to fulfill the original vision. His goal was to obtain "a notable organ by a builder not already represented in the Dallas area." The vestry authorized the organ committee and search, as well as the hiring of an acoustical consultant to evaluate the way sound works in the church. Trips were taken to visit organs, culminating in the committee choosing the firm of Richards, Fowkes and Co. of Ooltewah, TN, to build us a magnificent instrument. In January 2005 the vestry authorized the issuing of a contract for a 3 manual (keyboard) and pedal organ with 46 stops. The contract was signed and a 20% down-payment was made. The size of the organ is very similar in scope to the original one designed in the late 1960's for Transfiguration's new church building, as well as other specifications drawn up in intervening years. Please visit the firm's website [www.richardsfowkes.com](http://www.richardsfowkes.com) for examples of their work. Our stoplist can be seen by choosing "Opus 17" from the "Opus List" menu on the left of the homepage.

When we contracted for our instrument, Richards, Fowkes & Co. was completing the building of their 14th and largest organ for Pinnacle Presbyterian Church in Scottsdale, AZ. Since then and now, that organ has been installed, voiced, and dedicated, and Opus 15 has been built and installed at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville. Bruce Fowkes, co-owner of the firm, will spend much of the remainder of 2006 "voicing" the TN organ. This involves the process of manipulating the mouths or reeds of the pipes to speak in the room for which the organ is designed. Now only one instrument remains before ours: a 2-manual organ for the Divinity School Chapel at Duke University. Scheduled delivery for this organ is May 2007.

Here is the projected timetable for our organ:

*Summer & Fall 2006:* design work will begin. This will include the layout of the instrument, as well as the case design. We especially liked the way that Richard, Fowkes & Co.'s organs fit the

spaces for which they were built, so we are expecting something truly wonderful for the back of the church which will complement the stunning Triptych in the front!

*May 2007:* construction begins in the shop, taking 16 to 18 months. Our payments toward the organ begin and proceed monthly through the instrument's completion.

*Summer 2007 through fall 2008:* work on the organ continues. Trips will be made by various members of the Transfiguration organ committee, clergy, staff and vestry to the shop to review and certify the work in progress.

*Late 2008 or early 2009:* the organ arrives at Transfiguration! We will have an "unloading party" to carry the parts of the organ from the truck into the church, and the real fun will begin. One month will be taken to get the case and action assembled, then voicing will start. This process could take six months or more. During this time we will be able to use whatever stops are completed each week for services, giving us a larger instrument and pallet of colors every Sunday. Eventually we will have a wonderful service of dedication as well as a gala recital or two to showcase the organ to the greater Dallas community.

One of the exciting things to have happened during our last 1 ½ years of waiting, was a trip I made with two other members of the organ committee, George Gilliam and Jonathan Maedche, to play and inspect the 49-stop organ at Pinnacle Presbyterian in Scottsdale. We took pictures and made recordings, and were able to speak in depth with builder Bruce Fowkes regarding that instrument and designs for our own. The organ surpassed our expectations for beauty and versatility, and was truly a work of art in design and workmanship of the utmost quality.