

# **The Organ Project:**

## **Some Questions and Answers**

Vestry Communications Subcommittee June 2018

- **How did the organ project become so ambitious? I thought we were just replacing the organ.** The Organ Task Force (OTF) realized early on that replacing the organ was more complicated than first thought. The instrument had to be suitable to the building, but the building also had to be adapted to the instrument, both to accommodate its many pipes and mechanisms and to meet acoustical requirements. The type and placement of the organ, structural and architectural modifications, acoustics, aesthetics, liturgical needs and costs were inseparably related. The OTF found it necessary to consider carefully each and every aspect of the question and to provide a comprehensive, fully thought-out recommendation to the Vestry.
- **Why did you decide on Taylor and Boody?** Taylor and Boody was a most unexpected discovery of a highly reputed, world-famous firm that builds high quality organs right here in our area. They also have a special love for historic Virginia churches such as ours and are devoted to doing right by them. Although other organ-builders were considered, none of them took such a strong interest in our church, were as responsive to our concerns or provided such an attractive proposal. We were subsequently able to negotiate favorable price and delivery terms with them.
- **What are the specific features of the organ and why were they chosen?** The organ will have three manuals (=keyboards) plus a pedal keyboard, and it will have 26 stops. (The selection and combination of stops by the organist controls the color of the sound produced.) This

configuration, though modest, is appropriate because three manuals enable use of the full repertoire of organ music and 26 stops permit coverage of the major varieties of sound. The original design called for 29 stops, but to economize it was decided to reduce the number, while keeping open the possibility of adding three stops if funds become available.

- **What was the rush on signing a contract with Taylor and Boody?** The OTF had been at work for 18 months, had fully researched the issue and had reached unanimous agreement, and received the Vestry's approval. It takes at least a year to build a pipe organ, and Taylor and Boody are in high demand. The Vestry was aware that waiting longer to sign a contract could have meant that Grace would have been without a new organ for several more years instead of one more year. Taylor and Boody also made a \$41,000 price concession if the contract was signed by January 31st.
- **Why was a contract signed before a campaign feasibility study was done?** Approximately half of the total sum needed was already available. The OTF and the Vestry were and are confident that the remaining funds could be raised by appeal both to the congregation and to the larger Keswick community.
- **Why didn't I know more about the project before the contract was signed?** In November and December the OTF sponsored six parish presentations of its process and results, with unlimited opportunities for questions and answers. These sessions were well publicized, and the congregation was invited to any or all of them. These sessions were well attended by more than 100 parishioners and friends of Grace. An architectural model of the organ and chancel was placed in the parish hall in early January and members of the OTF and Vestry were made available to respond to any questions.

Extensive information on the project was posted on the Grace Church website. A subsequent report was published to the parish in January based on feedback and questions. Every effort was made to inform the parish through multiple channels before the Vestry decision.

- **Why didn't the parish get to vote?** Inquiries were made of the Diocese about the appropriate procedure in these circumstances, and Grace was advised that the responsibility for the decision belonged with the Vestry after the Vestry had communicated with the parish and solicited feedback, as it did during November through January. At the time of the Vestry decision on the Taylor and Boody contract on January 27 it was believed that there had been ample parish communication and feedback in order to proceed.
- **Couldn't this project be done at less expense?** The OTF spent 18 months exploring possible options for the project and it became clear that the only appropriate location for a new organ was the chancel area at the front of the church and that this would inevitably lead to costs in this range. The OTF unanimously concluded that, given the historic beauty of Grace, the best decision would be an investment in an equally historic organ that would further enhance our worship now and for generations to come. The durability of this organ, compared to others, can potentially match the durability of Grace church itself. Such an organ also minimizes annual maintenance and eliminates periodic replacement costs.
- **Couldn't we have found an organ that didn't involve changing the chancel area?** Once the OTF experienced a live demonstration of the major acoustical issues in the chancel, and the dilemma of the physical separation of the organ and the choir, it became apparent that there was no satisfactory solution for a new organ in the gallery. Also,

there was no way to place a fully mechanical organ, as was determined to be most appropriate for Grace, in the gallery. Since the chancel needed to be modified anyway to address its acoustical problems, installation of the organ in the chancel became increasingly compelling. The OTF had already learned that most church organs for choral and congregational singing are located in the front of churches. This placement of the organ also provided a happy occasion to address ancillary issues that have become apparent, i.e. often crowded space for weddings and baptisms. And it provided a new, unexpected opportunity for the future: an expanded and flexible chancel space for chapel services and a variety of performances for the benefit of Grace and the community.

- **Are the size and type of organ and the planned renovations/restorations historically appropriate for Grace Church?** The size and type of the organ have been specifically designed for our setting, and the organ casework in the chancel will reflect the crenellations of our Gothic tower. The planned renovations, although revising some features of the 1896 post-fire reconstruction, will result in greater architectural integrity and will be more consistent with the original, mid-19<sup>th</sup> century Gothic Revival design of William Strickland.
- **Have all the construction features been decided?** No, some of the details remain to be determined. Some construction is acoustically necessary. Other construction is needed to stabilize the flooring, to bring electrical wiring up to code, and to improve heating and cooling airflow and reduce noise. Still other construction is desirable for purposes of historical restoration, e.g. opening up the tower window to the nave. It is efficient and more economical to do all these things at once.

- **Why did you choose Ace Contracting?** Ace is a well-established local construction firm. One member of the OTF, Ralph Dammann, spent his professional life as a builder, frequently worked with Ace and found them to be reasonable, reliable and responsive. Ace has previously done similar “institutional” work. Other contractors were actively considered, but Ace was determined to be most suited to the work.
  
- **What happens if we don’t raise the rest of the money?** The OTF and Vestry gave considerable thought to the prospects of funding this project. Grace Church parishioners and community friends have long demonstrated their devotion and “can-do” approach to significant opportunities and the Vestry believes the project can be supported by the Capital Campaign. The compelling value of the organ project for future generations of Grace is our generation’s opportunity to assure that Grace remains a spiritual beacon of the Gospel and Christian outreach. The Vestry has secured favorable terms for bridge loans as needed for cash flow. While the plan is to raise all the funds by the end of 2019, it is common to have some residual debt remaining after a new organ is delivered and installed, and fund raising will continue as necessary.
  
- **Won’t such an expensive project require very large gifts?** Although the Capital Campaign will certainly welcome large gifts, its success will depend more heavily on the broad-based participation of all members of the parish and of interested friends in the Keswick community. It is hoped and expected that members of these constituencies will be generous within their means, and that everyone will share credit for the successful completion of the project. Gifts of any and all sizes will be received with gratitude.

- **Is this project appropriate for “a little country church”?**

Grace Church was once upon a time a little country church, but that description is no longer apt--except for the continuing love and friendships that we do enjoy here. Grace has 236 active baptized parishioners and a constantly shifting number of guests visiting and spending some time with us. Also, with an annual operating budget of \$483,542, and investments of \$1,374,761 (12/31/17), Grace is not small anymore. The church is located within easy reach of substantial residential areas-- Keswick, eastern Charlottesville/Pantops, Glenmore, Lake Monticello, Spring Creek, and Gordonsville. The new community of Rivanna Village will add about 400 housing units in the near term. Keswick is under further development as a wine and wedding destination in this much-visited scenic area. Increasingly, Grace is being positioned as a community center for this area, as we saw in the 2018 Garden Week event. The Farm Tour and Blessing of the Hounds, along with our historic character and beauty, continue to make us so. These are no longer the community characteristics of a little country church. The OTF and the Vestry believe that the organ for which we have contracted is quite appropriate for the church that Grace has become.