

Report to the Parish from the Organ Task Force

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The Task Force has completed eight presentations of our vision of the organ project to the Vestry, early major donors, and parishioners, totaling over 90 people. We received much enthusiasm for the project and some clarifying questions and responses. We would like to share these with you below.

A webpage has been created with other relevant documents from the presentations: <http://www.gracekeswick.org/organ-project-information.html>. The church model from Taylor & Boody will be on display in the parish hall.

Quotes from parishioners, by permission:

That was a really inspired presentation. Thank you for making a complicated subject clear and interesting for us all. What a vision for Grace! As always money rears it's head...but hold the faith! Even plenty of the smallest donations adds up. There has to be a way of doing this for the future of this most lovely and historic place. -- Lizzie and Bill McCowen

Your presentation regarding the new organ for Grace Church was such a well done, well researched project and I know it is still "in the works." The amount of time and labor that you and your task force have volunteered is to be commended! THANK YOU, as it helps all of the rest of us understand the details and all that is or could be involved as you move forward with this important and historical undertaking. -- Judith Truesdail

Just wanted you to know that we were truly impressed by the excellent presentation about the organ yesterday. I'm sure that groups in the past have had similar challenges, resulting in the beautiful buildings that we have today, and what we all need to remember is that this project is for the future (as those before us have done), and will be here for many years. -- Lenora and Patrick Conway

Grace Church is an historic gem. The church deserves the fine organ and accompanying architectural restorations which we--as stewards of Grace--have the opportunity to leave as our legacy. I'm excited to think that Grace could have a first-rate organ with a style and integrity matching that of the building it inhabits. -- Lesslie Crowell

Why not just repair the organ as it is?

In the beginning, we wondered about that a lot. Gradually we determined that that was not a good use of the \$214,000 insurance settlement. The size of this settlement is a testimony to just how much damage has been done to the organ. If we repaired it then we would still have an organ with dated electronics, an unpredictable lifespan, and harsh acoustics. We would also have to continue with a spatial disconnect between the organ and the organist/choir. This situation unavoidably rings of comparison to the insurance rebuild of the church after the fire where a disaster became an opportunity to both preserve the past and take an expansive, creative step into the future. This \$214,000 is a similar opportunity to take a new step into the future--and we would not necessarily get this same opportunity again.

Why is it so important to move the organ into the chancel?

Step-by-step, as we realized repairing the organ wasn't the best option, we also determined that putting a new organ in the gallery wasn't the best option either. Even a new organ in the gallery would be limited by the space—just as is this one—and limited by the acoustics of that location. Plus it would leave us with the anomaly of a spatial disconnect between the organ and the organist/choir plus the gallery closed off and blocking the tower window—both of which had never existed with the earlier organ configurations at Grace.

It was not obvious for some time that an organ in the chancel was even possible, with the limited chancel space. The final design presented to us by Taylor & Boody Organbuilders is highly innovative and would not have been technically possible before today. This organ location ends up addressing all the concerns we began to realize: restoration of the open gallery, reuniting the organ and the organist/choir, and a more manageable acoustical location.

But, still, why can't we just buy an organ and not get into all the other things?

The primary cost of the project is the organ itself—\$1.1 million. The cost of the other things may likely be less than half of that. Most of the other things are acoustically driven. This organ from the 1950s has been a great gift to the church. Now there is the technical expertise to install an organ and acoustically tune the church space. Improving the acoustics involves things like: changing the chancel from a largely unfinished cubic space to more rectangular, taller space with wood features, removing carpet from the chancel floor, removing as much carpet as possible from the nave floor, improving the heating/ac air distribution, and closing the side alcoves in the gallery.

There are other project aspects that also reasonably follow that are not acoustically-driven. The organ placement in the chancel would result in some loss of choir space--so to compensate for that the chancel would need to be expanded into the nave approximately 16 inches. To do that, it would then be necessary to remove the front two center pews. This then creates the possibility of more floor space there in the nave for weddings and baptisms—something that has been needed anyway. This also creates the possibility of

highlighting the font space better—since this is the architecture of the other primary sacrament of our faith, Holy Baptism.

The expanded chancel, switching to custom wooden church chairs, then gives us unprecedented flexibility for the chancel space. We could re-configure the chancel for intimate mid-week or special services. We could empty the chancel for special musical or other artistic performances for the parish and the community. All this space would be even more usable since it would finally be acoustically-tuned.

These other things are both necessary for a new organ and happy opportunities to address improvements we likely would have never attempted without this project.

Could this much money be better spent in other ways? The church budget? Helping more of our neighbors? More funding for children and youth ministry? Building something else instead? Focusing on planned giving instead?

It is unlikely we could acquire this amount of money for the church budget even if we wanted to. The “pockets” for supporting the church budget and the capital campaign are different “pockets” and motivate people in different ways. Money not raised for a capital campaign such as this does not simply transfer into more money for the church budget. But there can be a reverse effect, according to preliminary conversations with professional consultants who often find that a capital campaign actually enhances participation in the life and stewardship of a church.

Grace Church has long been engaged in outreach ministries of compassion in our community, with faithful support of the Food Closet, Salvation Army, and Habitat for Humanity. Since its inception, the Farm Tour has donated \$350,000 to local charities. The Vestry is seeking to add \$5,000 to the 2018 church budget for additional outreach and is exploring new outreach through its Community Task Force. The Organ Task Force conceives of this organ project as another form of outreach--a further enhancement of Grace’s outreach ministry of spiritual and cultural beauty in our community. We can do both these ministries of outreach. Both are important.

Children and youth ministry is going to continue to ebb and flow, requiring collaboration with our Director of Christian Education, patience with families, and continually innovative thinking. We already have a donated fund for Christian Education that is helping, along with your regular support of the church budget.

We’ve already built something else—the Parish Hall expansion. That was a visionary step that has continued to provide opportunities for a host of events and ministries. Think about all the things we do in our Parish Hall now: the grand coffee hours, Christian formation events, Food Closet, fellowship events, Salon events, Farm Tour and Blessing of the Hounds hospitality, Garden Club gatherings, AA, funeral receptions, etc. It is already unimaginable why we would ever want to return to pre-expansion days for the Parish Hall. We anticipate that would quickly be the case with this organ project as well, with its expanded opportunities for worship and events for the parish and community.

The organ project and planned giving do not have to be an either/or. We can still do the important work of inviting people to leave a legacy in their name for Grace through their will and other planned gifts. Both the organ project and more steady focus on planned giving can be a gift to the future life of Grace.

Does organ music really have a future in this changing religious landscape? Would we be preparing for a future that no one much will want anymore?

There is no doubt that music in churches has often already changed unimaginably just in our lifetimes. It cannot however be assumed that the only musical future for churches in America is going to be praise bands with sophisticated visual presentations. It is more likely that that will continue to be one of the futures. Rather than deleting organs from the future the more likely scenario is going to be further diversification that includes new forms of organ music and additional forms of musical instrumentation complementary to organ and piano. The refreshing of our liturgical space will make possible just that kind of flexibility that our future will need.

The Episcopal Church is a liturgical church that worships using historic biblical and Christian texts. The advent of a new prayer book in about five years will no doubt continue in that tradition while offering more flexibility than any prayer book before. A new hymnal will also provide us more resources than ever for musical diversity. This project will enable us to be more ready than we would be otherwise.

The majority of Christians in the world still worship in liturgical churches and there is no sign yet of a sudden and complete reversal of that reality. There will continue to be all kinds of experimentation. Some of it will be accessible to Episcopal churches and some of it won't. There will continue to be individual churches that struggle with decline and others that thrive. That line won't simply fall between praise band churches and liturgical churches. That line will fall within all kinds of churches.

Does Grace Church have a future that is worth investing in?

We never know the future, of course. We use our minds as best we can, we lift up our hearts together, and we keep living into our faith. The rest belongs to God.

Did the Grace church of the 1890s, after the fire, know if their church had a future worth investing in significant expensive changes to the church--adding side aisles, adding the front alcoves, adding the chancel and a recessed sanctuary, adding our beautiful sanctuary windows, and extending the back wall and roof of the church?

Did the Grace church of the early 2000's know if their church had a future worth investing over \$1 million dollars for a Parish Hall expansion?

Grace is an eye-catching church in an unusually beautiful, appealing, and historic area of Albemarle County. While our demographics presently don't make it natural to have a

mixed-age congregation to the extent of some other churches, Grace is a hub of our community in other ways, has considerable appeal to older adult residents in our area, and has access to resources that would not necessarily be possible in other settings.

We certainly do not lack for public visibility—between the Blessing of the Hounds, the Farm Tour, and the sheer beauty of the church. It is a visibility that many churches actively seek and just cannot acquire. We have the gift of a heritage, a place, and a visibility that grants us a continuing opportunity to keep thriving, if we seek it.

Through all the flux of the future, the best way for us to keep moving forward is to keep focusing on “first things first”: Offering spiritual worship that has deep roots in Christian tradition. Teaching the story of Jesus Christ. Growing in the understanding and practice of our faith. Finding ways authentic to our personalities and place to make friends for Christ by making friends. Individually committing to the stewardship of our money and time. Finding whatever way we can be a good neighbor to others. Not neglecting to meet together for our mutual encouragement and joy. And, in general, focusing on doing more with what we already do best.

One of those things we can do best at Grace is beauty—the beauty of stone, architecture, history, music, liturgy, and the beauty of friendship.

It is imaginable that this organ project fits well into this present reality of our life and ministry with mostly older adults. It presents the opportunity for us to be even more of a hub of spiritual and cultural life in the adult community here through even more compelling Sunday worship, other worship opportunities, organ recitals, and performance events—all in a restored, refreshed, and acoustically-tuned space.

Can we afford it?

In the beginning the Task Force didn't imagine a project like this. It was a long journey of discovery and we would find ourselves wondering if this was possible. We decided that the only way to find out was to keep moving forward. Along the way we kept having enthusiastic donors step forward to encourage us before the vision was even complete, totaling \$431,000 in pledges and donations. This is already in addition to the insurance settlement of \$214,000. Increasingly, this project has become imaginable. Like the Parish Hall expansion and other new initiatives at Grace—it is mostly a matter of the desire of our parish and our friends in the community.

What's “Plan B”?

That idea has crossed the minds of the Task Force but a Plan B has not emerged per se. One reason is the unanimity of the Task Force on the basics of this vision of the project. The other reason is that the Vestry needs the Task Force to make its best recommendation for what would be good for the future of Grace. The Vestry, if it chooses to proceed, will work with the Task Force and make any adjustments to the project needed.

What happens next?

The Task Force is working with a contractor to get an estimate of the total cost of the restoration and enhancement of the church. The results of our presentation experiences with the parish and the total estimated cost of the project will be presented to the Vestry in a special called meeting later in January.

Already blessed with over half of the cost of the organ without any fundraising and blessed with the willingness of the Vestry to apply planned giving funds, plans for a capital campaign will also be identified by the Task Force and recommended to the Vestry at that time.

If the project is approved by the Vestry, then our expectations are that we would have the first phase of church construction in the summer of 2018 and then the second and final phase with the organ installation and tuning in the summer of 2019.