

Press Release from St. George's Music Ministries

May 2019

This spring St. George's Episcopal Church in Nashville, Tennessee launched an ambitious capital campaign, *Living our Legacy*. Part of this campaign will fund a renovation of the chancel—which includes the installation of a new organ in the nave.

The St. George's Choir currently leads Sunday morning services from the chancel, which at St. George's is located behind the altar. This placement of the chancel greatly limits the choir's capacity to be seen, heard, and effectively lead worship in a traditional Anglican style. In 2017, Dr. Woosug Kang, Director of Music Ministries, conducted an experiment during Choral Evensong services. He moved the choir in front of the altar in a traditional Anglican setup—splitting the choir into two facing groups, traditionally called *Decani* and *Cantoris*. During this experiment, audibility and visibility were dramatically improved. In 2018, the choir remained in front of the altar for the Epiphany season, generating a strong consensus from church leadership that the choir's permanent placement should be in front of the altar. Dr. Wilma Jensen, Director of Music Emerita commented, "I am 100% behind moving the choir forward in the chancel. I think it will give new life and vitality to the liturgy."

The current chancel space presents challenges in bringing the choir forward. The existing placement of the altar creates a lengthy distance between the *Decani* and *Cantoris* groups when they face each other. This distance produces a sound delay between the choir parts, in addition to the sound delay already occurring from the distance between the organ pipes and the console. While the choir has worked to overcome these challenges, it is impractical to regularly lead worship in this setting.

After much deliberation, St. George's hired a liturgical consultant to create an updated chancel design. The consultant's professional recommendation is to open up the chancel by moving the altar backward and choir and organ forward. The result will allow the choir to more effectively lead the congregation in worship—while at the same time honoring the aesthetics of the space.

Because the organ will be affected by changes to the chancel, a professional organ consultant was asked to evaluate the current state of the Casavant organ and provide estimates for three possible scenarios:

- 1) Keep the current Casavant organ and pursue major maintenance work to address existing issues and prevent additional wear and tear from age and usage.
- 2) In addition to the major maintenance in the first scenario, build new casework to bring the organ forward, allowing St. George's to bring the choir forward and have a great impact in worship as desired.
- 3) Build an organ specifically for the new design of the chancel and the new acoustics of the nave.

The estimates showed that the most fiscally responsible decision for St. George's is to build a new organ as part of the planned chancel renovation. This will improve acoustics in the church and provide an organ that will best accommodate the reconfigured space. The organ committee—comprised of staff, lay leaders, and a professional consultant, has been working on this project for months, in part by researching and visiting different organs around the country to select a builder for our new organ. At the same time, our current Casavant organ is listed for sale. We honor its 35-year contribution to our worship life, and we look forward to finding it a loving home.

These are exciting times for St. George's and for the broader music community. We feel certain that the changes brought about by our desire to enhance the worship experience will strengthen St. George's musical legacy in Nashville and beyond.

Sincerely,

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