

Pipe Organ Project: Thoughts and Observations

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To: Bethel Lutheran Church, Round Lake, Minnesota
From: Paul Soulek

The current electronic organ was purchased in 1985 for \$8,000. The pipe ranks were added in 2002-2003 utilizing parts from 1950s vintage organs that were removed by Charles Hendrickson. While the organ continues to be playable, occasional stuck keys (on the console) and stuck chest magnets (in the pipe chest) often make it difficult for organists to make music. Upon further investigation, I discovered that the average life expectancy of an electronic organ is 15-20 years, though some remain playable longer. The internal console speakers are also not appropriate for a room the size of our sanctuary.

I began searching for possible remedies to the problems with the pipe portion of the organ, since I am directly responsible for the maintenance. I discussed the situation with Charles Hendrickson, president of Hendrickson Organ Company, a small St. Peter, Minnesota firm. Much of the current organ is composed of parts from Hendrickson's supply. Replacing the current pipe chests (boxes that control the distribution of air to the pipes) would cost around \$2,000 but would still leave us with an aging electronic console with an inferior sound production system. Charles offered a proposal for a complete pipe organ, which is outlined below.

5 ranks (sets) of pipes		<i>(we currently have 2 ranks)</i>
• Metal principal	85 pipes	
• Wooden flute	97 pipes	(24 new pipes, 73 re-used pipes)
• Metal string	61 pipes	
• Metal string celeste	49 pipes	
• Metal trumpet	61 pipes	

Totals: 5 ranks, 353 pipes

The blower could be re-used from the present organ, but new chests and air handling equipment would be required. The proposed organ would take approximately the same footprint as the current pipe addition (10 feet high x 12 feet wide x 3 feet deep). A new microprocessor pipe control system has been obtained from a home organ builder in Luverne. The system is relatively new and is recommended by Charles Hendrickson.

The cost for the items from Charles Hendrickson is \$4,000. This includes the four ranks of pipes (plus the additions to one of our present ranks), windchests, and an appropriately sized reservoir. The plan includes the re-use of our blower, which is in excellent condition. Charles does not have any used consoles on hand, however; good, used consoles are available across the country for around \$500. I am currently checking into consoles available from an organ builder in Minneapolis.

The mechanisms in this organ are along the lines of those installed at Our Redeemer Lutheran Church in Okabena, MN and Immanuel Lutheran Church in Lakefield, MN. The organ at Our Redeemer has survived 70 years without a major rebuild and is still in good condition. Pipe organs are built with quality materials that make them a good long term investment. With major rebuilds every 80-100 years, organs in Europe from the 1400s are still in excellent condition today.

The proposed organ is closest in size to the instrument in use at Trinity Lutheran Church in Brewster. It provides better leadership to hymns and liturgies than even the newest electronic substitute. Although Trinity's organ is 55 years old, it has required only minor service and yearly tunings and is completely playable today.

To keep costs down, the majority of moving, wiring, and planning work can be done by volunteers with the guidance of Charles Hendrickson. Voicing (small adjustments to pipes to fine tune them to the room) should be done by a member of Hendrickson's highly talented staff in order to produce an optimum sound in our space.

If such a project were to be approved, I would like to keep the current organ operating in its present state until the new organ would be completely ready to go. Following a successful pipe organ project, the current organ and pipe controllers could be sold for around \$2,000. It should be noted that the current pipe addition was completed at a cost of \$80 to the church. The pipes and related materials were donated and the control system (\$500) was given as a memorial.

A pipe organ project is desirable for many reasons. Besides replacing an aging system, a reliable pipe organ produces music in a different way than an electronic. It's similar to hearing a concert live or hearing it on CD. The CD can be deceptively close, but you can always tell when you're at the real thing. The pipe organ is the *real thing*.

Our organ serves weekly in leading the congregation's musical song of praise. It is my hope that we can join together to invest in a project that will allow our musicians to make beautiful music to the glory of God for many years to come.

Total project costs:

Pipes, chests, materials from Charles Hendrickson	\$4000
Console	\$ 500
Voicing from Hendrickson Organ Company	\$ 700
Fuel for transport of materials	\$ 100
Wood for new organ case	\$ 200
Total	\$5500

FAQ's

Where's the money going to come from?

Memorials could be used toward the construction; a plaque acknowledging these gifts could be located near the organ. Adopt-a-pipe programs have proven quite successful in churches as well. With this, the total cost of the project is divided by the number of pipes. In our case, this equals around \$15 per pipe ($\$15 \times 353 \text{ pipes} = \5295). Congregants could also adopt an octave (12 notes) for \$180 or a rank starting at \$795. Adopt-a-pipe programs are appealing because they bring the project down to an individual level and provide a way for those on fixed incomes to participate in the project.

What would a new pipe organ of similar size cost?

New pipe organs run at around \$10-12,000 per rank. A 5-rank instrument of a similar specification would cost approximately \$55,000.

What would it cost to replace our electronic organ with a similar instrument?

When Trinity-Sioux Valley's organ was struck by lightning in 1999 they purchased a new mid-level organ from Rodgers Instruments (the maker of our current organ). Their insurance obtained the organ for \$27,000, though the model normally sold for \$30,000.

What would happen if we don't do anything now?

The organ will probably continue to be viable for at least another few years. However, given my connections with Charles Hendrickson and available time to complete the project, I would encourage the consideration of a project at the present time.

Would installing a new organ pose a challenge to our organists?

A pipe organ console would be more comfortable to play, since it uses ivory or bone keys as opposed to the plastic touch of the current console. The console would be just as easy (if not easier) to work with, since the components would be more solid. The basic concept of both organs (stops, keys, pedals) remains the same.

How would the congregation benefit from such a project?

The quality of tone produced by a real pipe organ far exceeds anything an electronic or electronic/pipe combination organ can produce. By having the pipes fine tuned by a member of Hendrickson's exceptionally talented staff, the organ would be specially designed to lead our congregation in singing, which is the primary purpose of an organ.

How would volume be controlled?

Some of the pipes would be installed in a small enclosure that would have shutters opening into the sanctuary. Through the use of a pedal on the console the organist could control how far these shutters open, thus increasing/decreasing the volume. The organ would be carefully adjusted to provide enough strength without blowing people out of their seats.

What regular maintenance/upkeep is required to keep the organ in good shape?
 Yearly tuning and regular maintenance costs in the neighborhood of \$100-200 per year.

Can the balcony floor support the weight of a pipe organ?
 The weight of the materials is around the same of people sitting/standing in the area. Most materials are also located toward the back of the balcony close to the load bearing beams. Additionally, a tracker-action pipe organ was installed in the church in 1913 in the same location this much smaller, lighter electric-action instrument would be installed.

Who's this Charles Hendrickson guy you keep talking about?
 Charles Hendrickson is the president and CEO of Hendrickson Organ Company. The firm has produced over 100 pipe organs since Charles began building organs in 1966. I began working for Charles designing his website in 2000. Charles gave me the materials for our current pipe organ addition as partial payment for the initial design of his website. His expertise and generosity made our initial project possible and once again gives us the opportunity to install a pipe organ at well-below market cost. Hendrickson Organ Company has completed organs across the Midwest. Examples of his work include:

- St. Joseph Cathedral, Sioux Falls, South Dakota
 - Our Savior's Lutheran, Sioux Falls, South Dakota
 - First Presbyterian, Sioux Falls, South Dakota
 - East Side Lutheran, Sioux Falls, South Dakota
 - Bethel Reformed, Sioux Center, Iowa
 - Grace Lutheran, Spirit Lake, Iowa
 - American Lutheran, Windom, Minnesota (rebuild of fire-damaged organ, completion 2008)
 - Wayzata Community Church, Wayzata, Minnesota
- (Visit his website at www.hendricksonorgan.com for more information.)

How would the proposed organ compare in size to similar organs in the area?

<u>Church</u>	<u>Ranks</u>	<u>Seating capacity</u>	<u>People per rank</u>
Zion, Ocheyedon, IA	10	300	30
Trinity, Brewster, MN	5	225	45
St. Paul, Rost Township, MN	16	350	22
St. Matthew, Worthington, MN	16	600	37.5
Our Redeemer, Okabena, MN	4	175	43.75
St. Paul, Fulda, MN	20	400	20
Immanuel, Spirit Lake, IA	16	400	25
Bethel, Round Lake, MN	2	200	100 (current)
Bethel, Round Lake, MN	5	200	40 (proposed)

(It is important to note that location of the organ and voicing are responsible for volume and tonal quality more than the number of ranks.)