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May 23, 2005

Chris Gantner, Organist  
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Dear friends at PACC:

It was a pleasure to meet you all on Saturday. I hope my comments will be helpful to you.

Let me begin with the vision which I heard expressed on Saturday: a vision of PACC as a place where music draws in people from the greater Boston community...and ultimately leads them to life-changing worship. That is a grand vision for your church, and an accessible one, I think.

You have many "positives" at PACC. You have a good organ which makes good sounds; you have a fine and dedicated director of music; you have excellent acoustics in the room; you have folks in the church who are interested in being good stewards of the organ. Some churches have none of those "positives." You are most fortunate.

Here is what I think you should do. ( I will leave the really technical advice to my colleagues on the Organ Advisory Committee who have the expertise in that area.) I think you should repair the mechanical problems in the organ; and I think you should improve the organ tonally so that it is closer to what the original Skinner instrument was like. You really can't do one without the other; if you fix the tonal aspects of the instrument but neglect the fact that, for example, certain notes don't sound at all or pistons are dead, then there is no point in doing any of the work. The organ needs a better middle range; perhaps a mixture more compatible to the Skinner sound; new and more reliable wiring; better swell shades; and solid state combination action, which would facilitate moving the console. If you do these things, I think that the organ will attract organists and other musicians to give concerts at PACC. The Organ Advisory Committee Chairman, Dick Hill, will send you names of reputable builders to advise you.

I would like to suggest a change which I think might make a big difference in the music at PACC. I think you should take down the rather oppressive "fence" which keeps the congregation from seeing the choir. If you were to have a moveable organ console and flexible rather than fixed choir seating, you could easily have chamber and choir concerts

with plenty of room and even better acoustics up front. Some tonal changes in the organ would make it easier for choir members to hear the organ and to hear each other during performances.

I understand that PACC is considering a master plan for improvements to the building. The above suggested changes should be incorporated into that plan; it is much less expensive to undertake all of this at once than it is to apply band-aid solutions every now and then. It will be money well-spent. The church should think of improving and taking care of the organ as an important kind of stewardship for the future generations at PACC.

I have been organist at Acton Congregational Church for the past 23 years. During that time we have had several fund-raisers; one of which was an auction which raised \$40,000 in one night! Our church has 1200 members; yours is smaller; but the principle is the same: have a vision and work hard. The auction committee worked for a full year soliciting donations, hiring a professional auctioneer, finding an off-site venue, getting ads for a booklet, planning food. People donated a weekend at a summer cottage, baby-sitting for a year, special desserts, lessons and tutoring, art work, quilts, lawn mowing. People bid on these items and had fun and fellowship at the same time. Whatever the cost of your improvements turns out to be...you can do it! It is not selfish to spend money on the organ. Remember that good music draws people to your church, and the more people you bring in to join your fellowship, the more you reach a kind of critical mass which enables you to do more good in the world.

I wish you the very best as you embark on this exciting venture to improve worship at PACC. Please let me know if I can be of help to you.

Sincerely yours,

*Elizabeth B. Carley*