

THE COUPLER

THE DEAN'S MESSAGE



Lift Every Voice and Sing

For more than a century, *Lift Every Voice and Sing* has held a powerful place in American history.

It was written as a poem by NAACP leader James Weldon Johnson (1871-1938) and then set to music by his brother, John Rosamond Johnson (1873-1954), in 1899. It was first performed in public in the Johnsons' hometown of Jacksonville, FL as part of a celebration of Lincoln's birthday on Feb. 12, 1900 by a choir of 500 schoolchildren at the segregated Stanton School, where James was principal. The song would become known as the "Negro national anthem" after Booker T. Washington endorsed it in 1905, and the NAACP adopted it as an official song in 1919.

After writing the song, James Weldon Johnson was appointed U.S. consul first to Venezuela, then Nicaragua by the Roosevelt administration. After returning to the United States, Johnson became the
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FEBRUARY 2023

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CHAPTER NEWS

Members' recital coming in March

We are planning a recital by our members on Saturday, March 11, at 4 pm. The program's theme will be *Lenten Meditations*. You will have the opportunity to perform on the marvelous five-manual Austin organ at First Baptist Church, 1328 16th St. NW. If you would like to perform, please email a proposed program of 10-12 minutes to dcagochapter@gmail.com by Feb. 15. We will go out for drinks and/or dinner at a nearby restaurant afterward.



members Irvin Peterson and Karl Robson, Potomac member Dave McCahan and DC member Ken Lowenberg rehearsing Evensong music. The service was followed by a reception.

Twelfth Night Evensong and reception

The Potomac Chapter hosted us and the Northern Virginia Chapter for a Twelfth Night celebration at All Saints Episcopal Church in Chevy Chase on Jan. 9 after a two-year COVID break. From left, DC chapter

Free organ music available

Several scores have recently been donated to our chapter and are available for the cost of postage. If interested, send an email to dcagochapter@gmail.com.

- Organ transcription by Gerald Near of Lobe den Herren from Cantata No. 137 by J.S. Bach (Aureole Editions)
- Organ transcription by Gerald Near of two movements from Bach's Cantata 100, Was Gott tut (Aureole Editions)
- Noel: Christmas selections by Joyce Jones (Word Music)
- Two Carols for Christmas arranged by John G. Barr (H.W. Gray Publications): Meditation on In the Bleak Midwinter and Prologue on On This Day Earth Shall Ring



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District of Columbia Chapter

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THE COUPLER

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Send submissions to dcagochapter@gmail.com.

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Armand Peterson, chapter secretary

How did you become interested in the organ?

I am blessed to have a musical family who instilled in me the power of music through learning how to play various instruments. Growing up, I was fascinated by the various sounds of the organ and wanted to learn how to play so that I could positively affect the world through organ music.

What is your educational and professional background?

I am a proud graduate of Morehouse College ('17), where I earned a bachelor's degree in music with an emphasis in choral conducting. I studied conducting with Dr. David Morrow, organ with Dr. Joyce Finch Johnson (professor emerita and Spelman College organist), voice with Timothy Miller and piano with Dr. W. Jefferson Ethridge.

I have had numerous opportunities to tour the United States and perform as a background vocalist with notable artists, including John Legend, Patti LaBelle, Andrea Bocelli and Jennifer Hudson. I've also performed for numerous dignitaries at various political and civic events.

I currently teach vocal music to middle school students in the Prince George's County Public Schools and serve as a mentor teacher. I am the assistant director of music and creative arts at Metropolitan AME Church in DC and a member of the renowned Heritage Signature Chorale.

What are the joys and challenges of the organ for you?

I love being able to make music that speaks to and heals the soul! I also love improvisation. I thoroughly enjoy playing around with different chords and sounds of the organ, especially on hymn tunes.

My biggest challenge has been playing with both feet. When I started playing keyboard instruments, I began with the piano and Hammond organ. Of course with the Hammond, your left foot is the dominant foot on the pedal board. Every now and then I find myself using only my left foot and must go back to foundational exercises to get my right foot to join the left.

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Why are you an AGO member?

I joined AGO because I desire to be connected to a community of fellow organists who share similar values and beliefs. Additionally, I joined to learn from other organists, whether that be strategies and



techniques for playing the instrument or increasing my knowledge about music.

What do you enjoy doing when you're not making music?

I love to be out in nature hiking or bike riding, reading or spending quality time with family and friends. You'll also find me on my couch watching some of

ARMAND AT THE ORGAN AT METROPOLITAN AME CHURCH.

my favorite TV shows: *Abbott Elementary*, *Grey's Anatomy*, football, and *Living Single*. I'm currently binge-watching *Ginny & Georgia* on Netflix and it is very good!

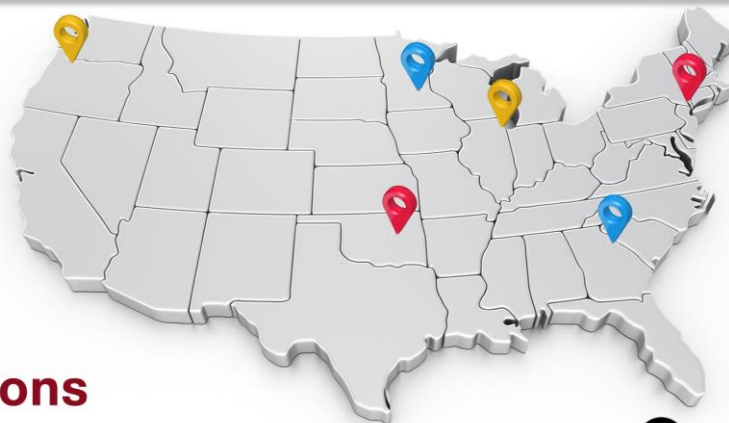
I enjoy cooking, although I find it tedious at times to cook for just one person (myself). I enjoy the art of creating flavorful dishes. My favorite things to cook are pasta, soul food and seafood.

What is your most memorable moment on the organ bench?

I was a guest artist for an event in Atlanta and forgot to turn off the automatic page turn on my iPad. Every time I moved my head, the page would turn. Thank God I had memorized just about the entire piece of music because I would have been as lost as a ship without a sail.

To nominate someone for the Member Spotlight, please send an email to dcagochapter@gmail.com.

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**Regional
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JUNE/JULY 2023

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ORGAN EVENTS

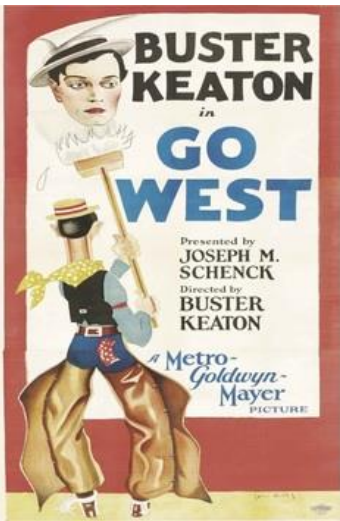
Wednesday, Feb. 1, 12:15 pm: The Howard Gospel Choir sings at St. John's-Lafayette Square. Founded in 1968, the group is the first collegiate gospel choir of its kind. Free.

Saturday, Feb. 4, 6 pm: Music director David Swenson performs works by Bach, Clerambault and Durufle at St. Mary Mother of God Catholic Church, 727 5th St NW.

Sunday, Feb. 5, 5 pm: Choral Evensong with prelude beginning at 4:40 by Jacob Reed, PhD candidate at the University of Chicago. The choir will sing works by Whitlock, Joubert and Martinson. Christ Church Episcopal, 118 N. Washington St., Alexandria.

Tuesday, Feb. 7, 12:10 pm: Harpsichordist Paula Maust of the Peabody Institute faculty performs selections from Elizabeth Turner's 1756 *Six Lessons for the Harpsichord*, one of the earliest published collections of keyboard music by an Englishwoman. Church of the Epiphany, 1317 G St. NW.

Tuesday, Feb. 7, 7:30 pm: Peabody Conservatory Organ Department recital sponsored by the Northern Virginia AGO chapter at Immanuel Chapel of the Virginia Theological Seminary, 3737 Seminary Road, Alexandria. Performers will be DMA candidates Midori Ataka and Justin Weilnau, Graduate Performance Diploma candidate Andrew Johnson and MM candidate Robert Baird. Repertoire will include Bach, Buxtehude, Mendelssohn, Reger and Wammes.



Friday, Feb. 10, 7 pm: Tedde Gibson accompanies Buster Keaton's silent film *Go West* on the pipe organ at Lewinsville Presbyterian Church, McLean. The local shop Vienna Vintner will curate wines thematically appropriate for the concert. A free-will offering will support the church's music department. Ample parking is available at 1724 Chain Bridge Rd. Hosted by chapter membership liaison John Nothaft.

Sunday, Feb. 12, 4 pm: David Swenson plays a recital at the Franciscan Monastery, 1400 Quincy Ave. NE.

Tuesday, Feb. 14, 12:10 pm: John Wolfe, director of music at St. Philip's Episcopal Church in Brooklyn, NY, performs works by J.S. Bach, Olivier Messiaen and Nicolas de Grigny. Church of the Epiphany, 1317 G St. NW.

Sunday, Feb. 19, 2 pm: Celebrate President's Day at Washington National Cathedral with Christa Rakich, visiting professor of organ at Oberlin College & Conservatory.

Tuesday, Feb. 28, 12:10 pm: Organist Paul Byssainthe, Jr., director of music at Sligo Seventh-day Adventist Church and dean of the DC AGO chapter, performs works by Maurice Duruflé, David Hurd and more. Church of the Epiphany, 1317 G St. NW.



CHRISTA RAKICH

Music at Midday features African American composers

On Fridays from 12:15-1 pm, National City Christian Church presents Music at Midday. The church is at 5 Thomas Circle NW in DC. Social distancing and masks are required. Admission is free; donations are gratefully accepted.

In honor of Black History Month, each concert during February will focus at least in part on organ works of one or more African American composers.



JOHN A. WOLFE

Feb. 3: New York City organist John A. Wolfe performs works of Ned Rorem, Roy Belfield and Felix Mendelssohn.

Feb. 10: Organist Glenn Little (Stafford, VA) performs works by African American composers, including Nicholas Bowden, Eurydice V. Osterman, David Kidwell, Adolphus Hailstork, Carl Haywood, Calvin Taylor and Florence B. Price.

Feb. 17: Baltimore organist Andrew Johnson presents works by Ralph Simpson, George Walker, Felix Mendelssohn, William Bolcom and Louis Vierne.

AND...



Feb. 24: Former chapter deans David Houston, far left, and Irvin Peterson perform works for organ and saxophone by composers Lani Smith, Paule Maurice, Alma Bazel Androsso and Jimmy Dorsey, as well as their own improvisation on *Lift Every Voice and Sing*.

David and Irvin invite all chapter members to go to lunch with them at a nearby restaurant after their recital. See you there!

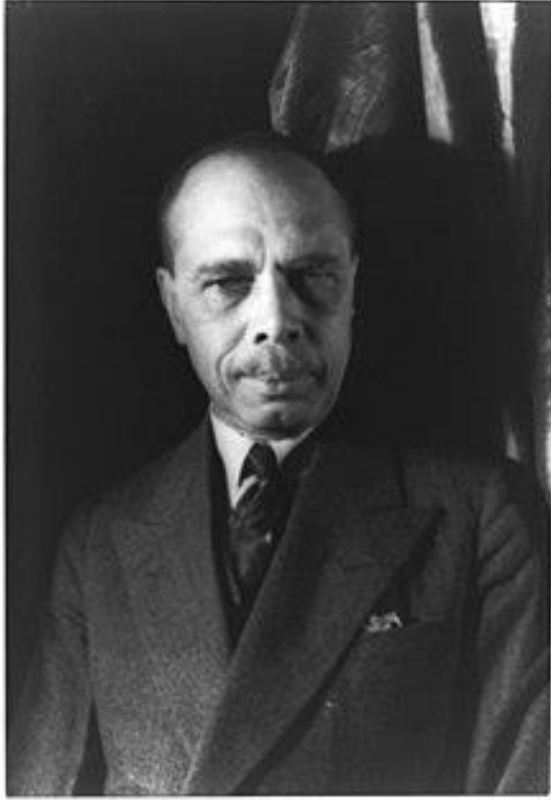


Can you name five women composers for the organ? If you're struggling, consider that women composers, particularly of sacred music, have been overlooked for centuries. That's changing. The AGO, the Society of Women Organists and the Royal College of Organists will celebrate organ and choral music by women by inviting everyone to play or sing something by a woman on March 5, 2023.

The Dean's message

From Page One

first African American to be chosen as executive secretary of the NAACP (a great majority of the founders and early leaders were white). He was fierce anti-lynching crusader and coined the term "Red Summer of 1919" to describe the blood in the streets during race massacres that erupted



nationwide after World War I. Johnson eventually served as chief operating officer of the organization, a position that allowed him to outline and implement foundational strategies that incrementally combatted racism, lynching and segregation and contributed to the eventual death of Jim Crow laws.

Lift Every Voice and Sing was written at a pivotal time when Jim Crow was replacing slavery and African Americans were searching for an identity. Shana Redmond, professor of musicology and African American studies at UCLA, says it's a song about transcending difficulties – and those difficulties have never fully receded. "It allows us to acknowledge all of the brutalities and inhumanities and dispossession that came with enslavement, that came with Jim Crow, that comes still today with disenfranchisement, police brutality, dispossession of education and resources," Redmond says. "It continues to announce that we see this brighter future, that we believe that something will change."

JAMES WELDON JOHNSON

Equal parts honoring the painful past and articulating optimism for the future, these lyrics remain as relevant in 2023 as they were over a century ago when they were first penned. An ever-present refrain, this hymn has been a part of my consciousness for all my life but has gained increasing relevance over the past several years as our country has openly grappled with the ongoing struggle for equality and justice.

As we celebrate Black History Month -- the brainchild of noted historian Carter G. Woodson, who selected February to encompass the birthdays of two great Americans who played a prominent role in shaping black history, namely Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass, whose birthdays are the 12th and the 14th, respectively -- I encourage us to take the words of this powerful hymn to heart and "sing a song full of the faith that the dark past has taught us ... sing a song full of the hope that the present has brought us." We have indeed come such a long way and made tremendous progress, and yet there is still much work to be done. Let us march on until victory is won.

Grace & Peace,
Paul Byssainthe, Jr.

OBITUARY

Lifetime chapter member Al Russell dies at 91

By Gabe Simerson

Ira Albert “Al” Russell Jr., 91, died at his home in Washington, DC on Jan. 24 after a brief decline.

Dubbed “the Prince of the American Organ,” Al was best known for his tenure as organist-choirmaster of St. John’s Episcopal Church, Lafayette Square and his association with Maurice Duruflé’s iconic *Requiem*, of which he made the first American recording.



Born in Marlin, Texas on May 15, 1931 to Ira Albert Russell Sr. and Helen Moore Russell, Al later moved with his family to the town of Stamford, where he would accompany his mother to choir practice and reach up to the organ keyboard as the organist led rehearsal. He began piano lessons at age 6 and organ lessons at age 12 at a local Methodist church with a two-manual Estey organ and bird nests in the choir loft.

He went on to study with Robert Markham at Baylor University, where he was also chapel organist; took church jobs in Waco and Marlin before joining the Air Force; and eventually moved on to University Methodist while attending the University of Texas, Austin, where his classmates included fellow figureheads Gerre Hancock, Kathleen Thomerson and Joyce Jones.

In 1953, Al came to DC with \$50 in his pocket to study organ with William Watkins, then returned in 1954 to complete his bachelor’s degree at the Washington Musical Institute. That fall, he enrolled in Union Theological Seminary, where his teachers included Searle Wright. Through Union connections, Al played one of the opening recitals in 1956 on the new Aeolian-Skinner organ of St. Thomas Church, Fifth Avenue in New York. Other New York teachers included Charlotte Garden and Harold Friedell – influences Al credited for the rest of his life – and he served as assistant and substitute for Virgil Fox at the Riverside Church.

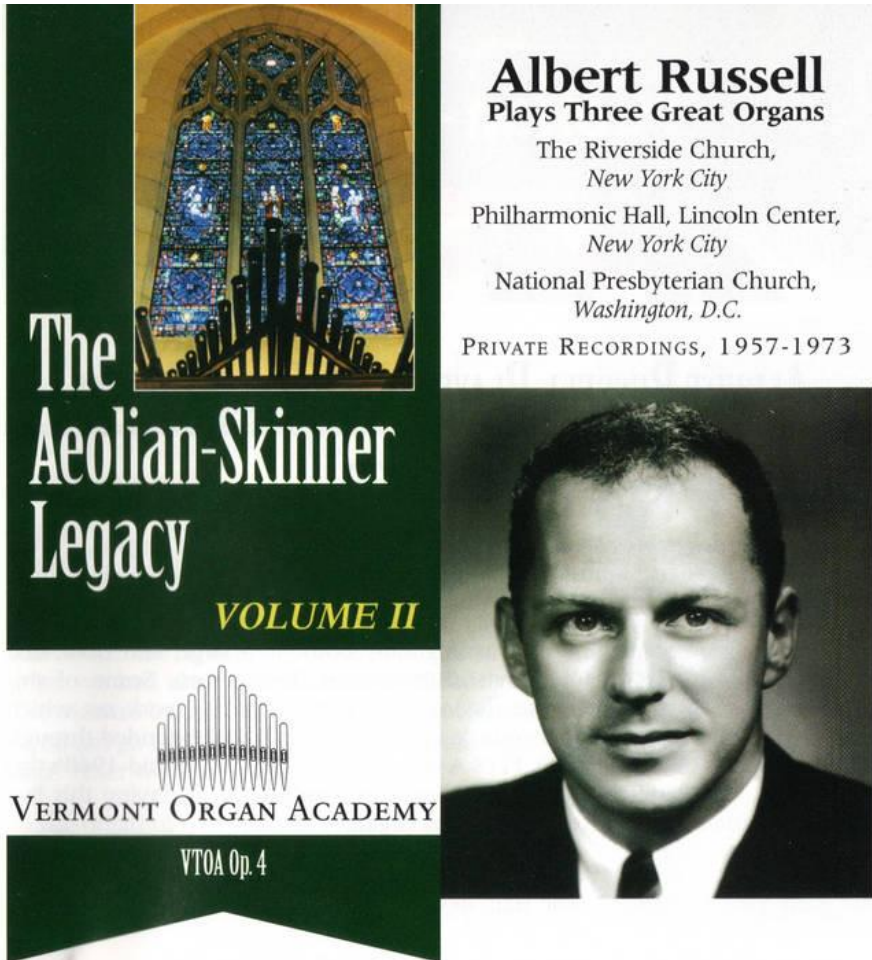
After graduating from Union, Al moved to Asylum Hill Congregational Church in Hartford, CT, where he led a campaign for a new Aeolian-Skinner organ, rebuilt the choral program and, most notably, in 1963 led the first commercial recording of the Duruflé *Requiem* in America. One of Al’s best-loved stories concerned the night the Duruflés came for dinner and were served gumbo, which Madame gladly tried and Monsieur refused to touch. During this period Al was engaged to record on the “King of Instruments” label for the Aeolian-Skinner company, playing on the organs of Asylum Hill and Philharmonic Hall in New York.

In 1966, on a recommendation from Washington Cathedral’s Paul Callaway, Al came to Washington
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to become organist and choirmaster of St. John's, where he remained until his retirement in 1985. St. John's being the "church of the presidents," Al told stories of how the allure of celebrity was tempered by the need for security, including Secret Service dogs in the organ chambers.

While in Washington, Al continued his teaching career -- begun at the Hartt School in Hartford -- at



Peabody Conservatory, American University, the Catholic University of America and the now-defunct College of Musicians, having been invited by Leo Sowerby, from whose apartment the two men watched the 14th Street fires of 1968.

In the early 1980s, Al was diagnosed with focal dystonia, a neurological issue affecting the fingers, which precipitated his departure from full-time church work. His strategies for subsequently managing the Duruflé *Requiem* accompaniment, inextricably linked with him, became renowned in themselves.

He continued to perform well into his later years and lived most of the last couple of

decades of his life at The Westchester in northwest DC. Musicians from Washington and beyond harbor memories of evening drinks and conversation on his famous balcony as the setting sun lit up the west front of the Washington National Cathedral. This was the Al that all will remember: a humble icon who just wanted to chat with a friend.

He was predeceased by his parents and by Ed Thomson, his partner of 54 years.

A funeral will be held at the Church of the Ascension and St. Agnes in DC on Saturday, March 11, at 10 am with a reception to follow. In lieu of flowers, donations in Al's memory may be made to the Church of the Ascension and St. Agnes, 1215 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20005.

JOB OPENINGS

District of Columbia

Organist: First Baptist Church, 1328 16th St. NW. Part-time. Five-manual, 118-rank Austin organ. Click [here](#).

Church musician: St. John CME Church. \$200-\$400 weekly. Click [here](#).

Maryland

Organist/choir director: St. Francis Episcopal Church, Potomac. Part-time. \$30,000 annually. Click [here](#).

Music director: Christ Church, Easton. Four-manual Rodgers Infinity Model 484MV organ; funding to support a professional choir. Part-time position or full-time with salary and benefits. Click [here](#).

Music director: First Baptist Church of Suitland. \$18,000-20,000 annually. Click [here](#).

Director of music/organist: St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Waldorf. \$24,000-26,000 annually. Three-manual Rodgers Trillium 927 organ. Click [here](#).

Virginia

Interim music director: The Falls Church, Falls Church. Half-time. 1993 Steiner-Reck, Op. 98, 49 ranks; 1967 Schantz, Op. 803, 12 ranks. Click [here](#) for details from agohq.org.

Organist/pianist: Aldersgate United Methodist Church, Alexandria. \$15,000-20,000 annually. Click [here](#) for details from agohq.org.

Music director/organist: Grace Episcopal Church, Cismont/Keswick. Part-time. 2019 Taylor & Boody pipe organ. \$27,500 (negotiable). Click [here](#).

Organist: Parish of St. Andrew and St. Margaret of Scotland, Alexandria. Part-time. \$20,000 annually. Click [here](#) for details from the agohq.org website.

Welcome!

We welcome new members Patrick R. Walker, CAGO, MM; George Fergus; and Dr. Garnet Mowatt.

THE COUPLER

Promote your event, product or cause with an advertisement in The Coupler, the official publication of the District of Columbia Chapter of the American Guild of Organists. Rates: full page (4 issues), \$100; half-page (4 issues), \$50; quarter page (4 issues), \$25. Email advertising requests to dcagochapter@gmail.com with "The Coupler" in the subject field. Make checks payable to DC Chapter, American Guild of Organists and send them to DC AGO, P.O. Box 39179, Washington, DC 20016.

LIFE MEMBERS

Blanche Curfman

Nancy Dodge

Robert Grogan

Eileen Guenther

Irv Lawless

Kenneth Lowenberg

Albert Russell

Donald Sutherland

David Hearn (deceased)



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SAINT DOMINIC CATHOLIC CHURCH WASHINGTON, DC

“The Island”, as it was often called in the nineteenth century, consisted of the area now known as Southwest Washington. Members of the Order of Preachers – the Dominicans – have stood witness in this historic part of the District of Columbia for over 160 years. The present structure, designed by noted New York City-based architect Patrick Keely, was completed in 1875. Just a decade later, in 1885, a fire destroyed the church’s interior, which was quickly restored. At the same time, the church was adorned with a grand new organ.



We at Di Gennaro-Hart are pleased to announce that we have been commissioned by the Archdiocese of Washington to undertake a major restoration of the Hilborne L. Roosevelt instrument. Cousins to Teddy, Hilborne and his brother, Frank Roosevelt, were among the very finest nineteenth century American organ builders.

The project will include the replacement of the 1929 English-style console with an “American terraced” console built according to current AGO standards. The console will offer a strong nod to the Roosevelts, particularly through the use of the engraving font that was commissioned by their firm. The present solid state control systems will be replaced with a 100 channel capture system and a new switching system with performance recorder. The reeds will be restored, numerous repairs will be completed, and the entire instrument will be thoroughly cleaned. A powerful Tuba stop, constructed by a shop that traces its roots to the Roosevelt firm, will be added.

Father Jordan Turano, OP, *Pastor*
JC Cantrell, *Music Director and Worship Coordinator*

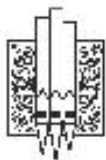


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