

## **Congregational Meeting Update - Piano**

Last Sunday, after church, a congregational meeting was held to hear the results of the work of the TEAM OWEN committee that was struck by the Church Council to seek out ideas to honour the legacy of our church musician, Owen Fraser, here at St. John's.

The mandate was to do something for the church in Owen's name.

The committee sought the input of the congregation via email and verbal replies, and met regularly to discuss the suggestions that were received. The Church Council was updated during the process. The committee members were: Roberta Bunker, Ralph MacDonald, Lillian MacMellon, and Aaron Billard.

The suggestions the committee received were presented to the congregation, including an organ fund; scholarship fund; chair pads for pews; video screens for the sanctuary; renaming the Fellowship Room or Great Hall to The Owen Fraser Hall; and the purchase of a grand piano to be permanently placed in the sanctuary. Everyone was thanked for making submissions.

The most-suggested idea (by far) was to consider purchasing a grand piano for the sanctuary. Several members of the congregation were consulted for their knowledge, as well as many individuals outside of the church who are well-known in music circles, such as piano tuner David Gregory, Mount Allison, and the Université de Moncton. We were told that if we were going this route what to avoid, and who to talk to, specifically Dr. Piano in Halifax. We were also given a ball-park figure of this instrument, which was significant: upwards of \$50-55,000.

After negotiating with Dr. Piano in Halifax, a price of \$39,997 (taxes and delivery included) was received. Gary Trenholm, the owner, also reminded us we will be able to get half the tax back as a church. Also included, after several negotiations, are a concert-quality bench, a dehumidifier (important for such an instrument), the device to move it, and a covering for the piano when not in use. Each of these items together would cost over \$3000.

This is not the first time in our church's history that such an expense was fundraised. Owen loved to tell the story of the church authorizing representatives to go to Quebec to purchase our Casavant organ for no more than \$7,000! (That was back in 1914!)

On a personal note, Owen would never have imagined that such a gift would be considered in his name; however, I will say that there was no one more excited than he was when a grand piano was in our church

for concerts. He came and got me when they were bringing one in (with great difficulty I might add), and he was delighted when the university left it for a few extra days so he could play it, as well as use it for our Sunday service.

He was humble and practical, but he also loved music, and he shared the love of instruments with anyone who was curious as he encouraged them in their curiosity. He had a dream of someday, perhaps, installing a digital organ in the church, much like the one he built for his home, only "much, much bigger." Owen was a "do it now and ask forgiveness later" kind of guy. I think if he heard such an instrument played in his name, in his church, by children and adults, I know he would tear up and say, "Wow!" But, he would never expect it nor have imagined it. This is why we do it in his honour.

After much discussion, it was moved by Joan Donald, seconded by Mary Campbell, that the process begin to raise funds to purchase a grand piano for permanent use in the sanctuary in memory of Owen Fraser. Motion carried. After considerable discussion about further projects to recognize Owen Fraser, it was moved by Gordon Hicks, seconded by Hugh Donald that the Great Hall be renamed the Owen Fraser Hall. Motion carried. It was moved by Frederick Leidemer, seconded by Alberta MacLellan that funds raised in the process of acquiring funds for the purchase of the grand piano in excess of the initial purchase price be reserved to be spent on its ongoing maintenance. Motion carried.

Thank you all for your participation in this process as we remember our friend, whose love and hard work brought us (and his choir) together in ways that we never dreamed possible. In that spirit of unity, let us move forward as St. John's. We grieve Owen's death but we continue to celebrate his life and legacy. Last evening, at the choir party at Camp Centennial (which was Owen's ministry to and with children) we were so pleased to feel his spirit at work there in that place. And we very much feel his spirit present in the music at our church.

Many people, both inside and outside the church, have been asking how to contribute to this project. The church will be receiving contributions right away in 2016 and into 2017. Personal cheques can be made out to St. John's United Church with "Owen Fraser Fund" or "Piano fund" in the memo section of the cheque. Also, if you would like to use a church envelope, in the "other" section indicate "piano" or "Owen Fraser Piano fund".

On behalf of Team Owen, thank you. The Rev. Aaron Billard, Minister