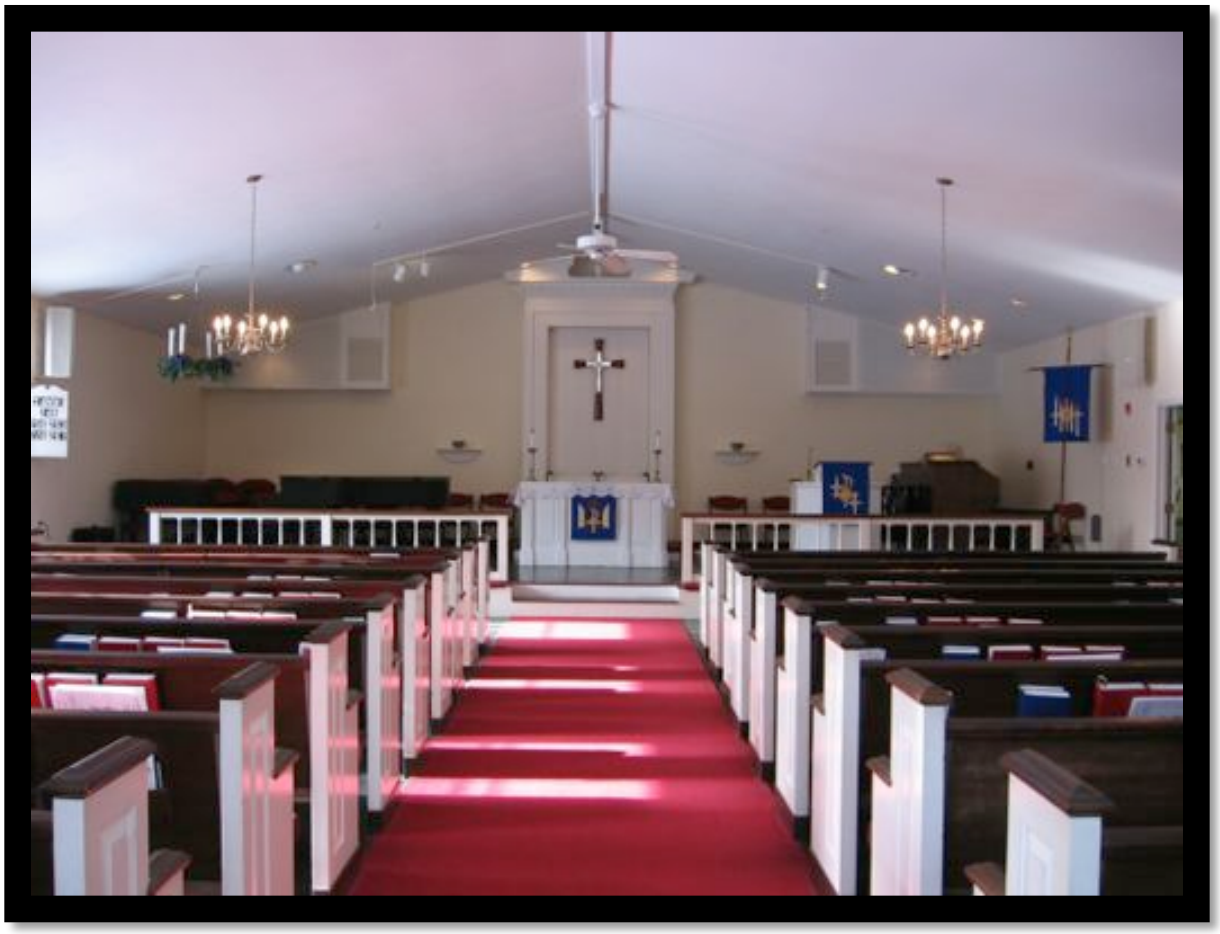
LITURGICAL ASSESSMENT REPORT

FOR

OUR SAVIOUR'S LUTHERAN CHURCH
160 Farm Hill Road, Fairfield, CT 06824



James Hundt

Liturgical Design Consultant

www.jameshundt.com • ldc@jameshundt.com
426 State St., 3rd Floor, Schenectady, NY 12305
Tel: 518-372-3655 • Fax: 518-372-3656

SCOPE OF ASSESSMENT:

Our Saviour's Lutheran Church has been offered a gift of a single manual, 8-stop, mechanical action 1875 Hutchings and Plaisted organ (with some parts from the 1840's). Rebuilt in 1979 by Jeremy Cooper of Concord, NH and maintained by him since that time, it is in excellent condition. According to Alice Caldwell, Director of Music for Our Saviour's Lutheran Church, it is "a high-quality instrument of a size and tonal design that is very well suited to the needs of OSLC." The congregation must decide whether to accept this gift by December 31, 2013, with the condition that it be installed in the center of the chancel by March 15, 2014. The question is how to best accommodate the instrument into the existing worship space while meeting the liturgical needs of the congregation.

RESEARCH PERFORMED BY THE CONGREGATION:

Members of the congregation created a mock-up of the instrument and placed it in the center of the chancel. Two different configurations have been mocked up. The first was with no changes to the back wall of the chancel. The organ needs 2' clearance in the back to allow for maintenance access. Thus the effective footprint of the 5' x 7' case is 7' x 7'. The keyboard, pedalboard, and bench extend out from that approximately two feet. Members marked out measurements and moved furniture to determine if the available space can indeed hold the organ. See photo below.

The second mock-up represents a second option—to recess the organ 2.5 ft. into the room behind it. This would require creating an alcove 4.5 ft. deep by 13 ft. wide to provide adequate access for tuning and maintenance. See photo below:

[Note that this mock-up is not entirely accurate because it does not show the impact of the alcove required for maintenance. With the alcove being three feet wider on each side, more of the organ casework would be visible than the portion visible in this mockup.]

OBSERVATIONS:

As part of my assessment process, I attended the morning worship service. I sat along the side aisle near the windows, about halfway up the aisle. I tried to pay particular attention to how the space worked for liturgy. Following are my observations:

1. Looking at the chancel, the left side and center of the chancel seem very crowded. As there is less than two feet between the raised platform for the presiding minister and the altar, it appears very crowded when he and his assistant lead from that location, as they are literally up against the altar.
2. The left side of the chancel appears to be crowded because it holds a 3'-wide harpsichord and a 6'-6" long grand piano (plus space for the bench and an area to walk behind the bench) in an area that is only about 15' square, which results in the piano being within a few feet of the altar. Because it is taller than the altar, it tends to visually overpower it. It also looks somewhat casual and unprofessional when the singers, who stand behind it, use the piano as a music stand.
3. Looking at the right side of the chancel, the larger, taller electronic organ tends to draw attention away from the simple, white ambo.
4. The wall-mounted organ speakers and vents on the back wall of the chancel add to the visual clutter.

LITURGICAL GUIDELINES:

The recommendations in this report are based on the principles found in *Renewing Worship, Vol. 2: Principles for Worship*. Based upon *The Use of the Means of Grace,* the statement on the practice of word and sacrament adopted in 1997 by the ELCA Churchwide Assembly, *Principles for Worship* provides foundational principles in the areas of language, music, preaching, and worship space, throughout the church. Specific principles that apply to this assessment include the following:

Principle M-2: In the church, the primary musical instrument is the human voice, given by God to sing and proclaim the word of God.

Principle S-7: The assembly space includes primary centers for the celebration of the word of God and the sacraments, secondary areas that facilitate the roles of all the leaders, and other spaces that complement the requirements of communal worship.

Principle S-11: The worship space includes designated spaces for worship leaders. The place for presiding and assisting ministers is distinct, but not overly separated or elevated.

Principle S-12: Providing adequate areas for choirs and instrumentalists allows them to function effectively as worship leaders.

Principle S-19: Flexibility of space and portability of furniture facilitate the variations of worship as well as related activities of congregation and community.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

In my preliminary discussions with church members on the afternoon of Sunday, Dec. 15, 2013, I talked about evaluating both of the mocked-up options. I shall address the recessed option first.

Currently, there is a raised platform for the presiding minister and his assistant. That platform measures 6'-11" wide by 5'-1" deep. If the organ were recessed into an alcove such that the casework was halfway into the rear wall of the chancel, the remaining projection would be 2.5 feet, plus about another 2 feet for the bench and pedalboard, giving a total depth of 4.5 feet or slightly less than the current raised platform. Therefore, the organ would not take up any more space than the current raised platform.

Looking at Principle S-7, I wonder if the leadership from behind the altar is inconsistent with that principle. If the altar is the focal point of the place of the meal, it seems that the presider spends too much time at the altar for purposes other than the sacrament of Holy Communion. I believe that this is primarily because that is where his chair is and that if his chair were in another location, he would be able to preside from somewhere other than behind the altar. Although in many churches the chair is behind the altar, it is not usually as close as it is at OSLC so it does not appear that the presiding minister is "at the table", as it does at OSLC. Therefore, if the platform for the presiding minister was moved elsewhere, the organ could fit in this scenario without any other modifications to the chancel. However, this does not address the basic problem of overcrowding by the music ministry. It also requires the difficult and expensive creation of a large alcove and the loss of the use of part of the adjacent room.

Looking at the other option of just placing the organ in the existing chancel, with two feet of clearance behind, it takes up more than half the depth of the existing chancel and does not leave enough room for the altar and circulation. For this scenario to work, most of the chancel would have to be extended out at least another three feet. The distance between the current chancel and the front edge of the first pew is 6'-3-1/2". Extending the chancel three feet would decrease that distance to 3'-3-1/2", which is too small. Therefore, one pew would have to be removed at the front, which would decrease the seating capacity from 154 to 140. On the other hand, this increased depth would allow the grand piano to be rotated, keeping it even farther from the altar. The expanded chancel would also create much more room for concerts and other events – especially with the old electronic organ console gone. It would also make up for the approximately 36 square feet of space lost by a wheelchair ramp, should that option be selected. The attached diagram shows how the choir and piano would fit in the expanded space. This scenario addresses the basic issue: it is not that the organ is too large for the worship space; it is that it is too large for the chancel. By increasing the size of the chancel, the organ will fit better within the chancel.

As far as the visual impact of the organ, the first thing to look at is how it will fit within the space visually. In terms of scale, it is actually approximately the same height and width as the woodwork currently at the center, which is 6'-8" wide by 13' high versus 7' wide by 12'-2" high for the organ. The organ's visual height could be further reduced by recessing it into a pit. Contrary to some opinions expressed earlier, it should be relatively

easy to remove a portion of the existing wood chancel platform to create a pit into which the organ could be installed – as long as access is not required to the bottom 12" of the instrument for maintenance. This would increase the distance from the peak of the organ to the ceiling from 10" to 22". If the altar remains in front of the organ, it would cut off an additional 38" from view which, by my estimate, would eliminate from view just about everything below the main façade pipes. If further screening is desired, a removable screen could be placed behind the organist and would be in place for Sunday worship but could be removed for concerts. Such a screen is probably not necessary as long as the organist does not leave music on the rack when not playing, which would be visible and very distracting behind the altar.

There is some concern that the color and style of the organ is incompatible with the existing church. That is not entirely correct. Although the wood is black walnut, which is often used in Gothic architecture, the design of the casework is not of any particular architectural style. The pediment, which is the most ornate part of the casework, is simply a filigreed design that would allow light to pass through it. (In its current installation, there is a dark beam behind it that prevents light from getting through it.) Looking from the back of the sanctuary, we see nothing but the dark wood of the pews, accented by the white-painted ends, just as the dark casework of the organ is accented by the light-colored painted pipes. There is already a certain amount of continuity that could be enhanced by incorporating any or all of the following options:

- Install a walnut top on the existing altar.
- Replace the existing pulpit with a new pulpit that matches the design of the altar and includes a walnut cap on the surround and a walnut reading surface.
- Add a paneled, painted wainscoting with a walnut cap throughout the sanctuary.
- Replace the existing communion rail with a new communion rail that reflects some of the design details of the organ casework, either in a dark wood or in a combination of dark and painted wood.
- Choose paint color(s) for the back of the chancel that compliment the colors of the painted pipes.
- Create new flower stands and chancel tables based on the design and tone of the organ casework for placement within the chancel.

You might also want to consider adding lighting to wash the organ casework in light, which would lighten the apparent color of the wood without actually changing it.

SUMMARY:

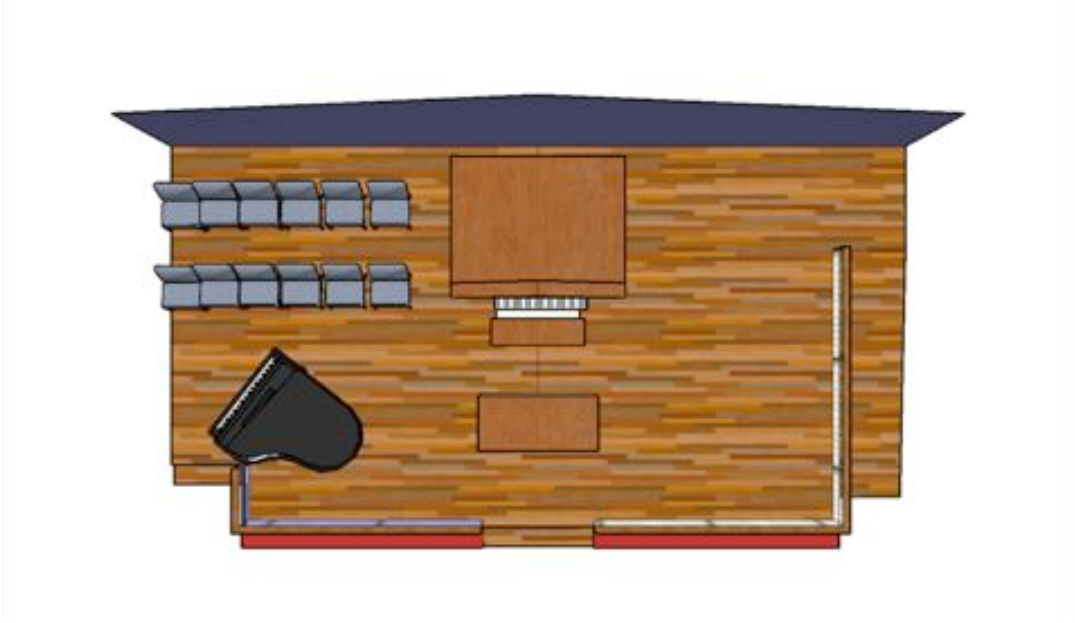
Our Saviour's Lutheran Church has been offered a very generous gift of a musical instrument that will help enhance worship by improving the quality of the music. OSLC has an organist who knows how to play a pipe organ and would make use of it in a variety of ways that would benefit the church and the community. The chancel is already overcrowded so something should be done about that in any case. If the church decides to accept this gift, with a minimal amount of expense, they could incorporate the organ into their sanctuary.

Should you opt for the non-recessed option, to have the organ installed by the deadline, you would only need to remove the old organ and the raised platform, create a pit for the organ in the floor (or reinforce the existing floor structure as necessary to support the organ's weight of 86 pounds per square foot), move the place of the presiding minister to a new location on the right side of the chancel and create a new, moveable platform in that location, and move the altar forward. The remainder of the improvements could be carried out as time and funding allows – either before or after installation of the organ. In the end, this approach would be much more cost effective than creating an alcove and would solve more than the one "problem" of accommodating the donated organ. It should also be noted that the thirteen-foot wide alcove would represent more than a third of the back wall of the chancel. From an aesthetic point of view, that seems to be rather large for an alcove. I believe that such a design would make the chancel look like it was designed for the organ rather than for the sacraments and the word.

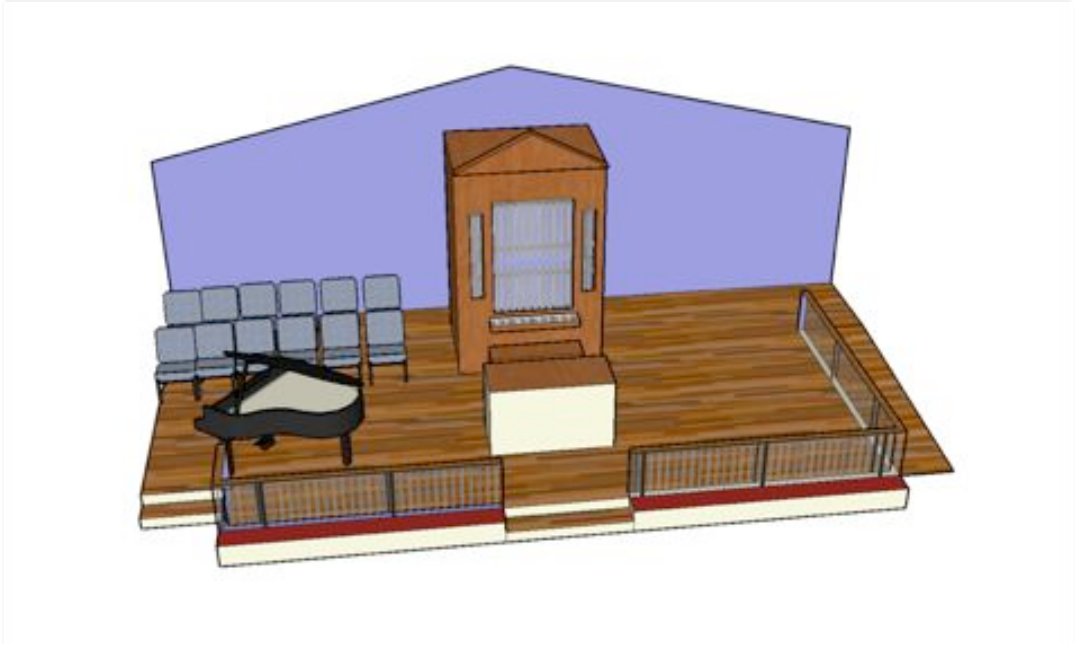
To complete the installation, I also recommend that the woodwork on the rear wall of the chancel be removed. It could easily be adapted to a surround for the main entrance into the sanctuary. I recommend that the cross be suspended over the normal location of the altar. As the silver cross is on a wood backdrop, if suspended so that the organ pipes are in the background, it should be easily visible from most locations within the sanctuary. I believe the scale of the cross will still work in this arrangement. Care should be taken in hanging the cross to stabilize it against swinging.

The church may want to seek further assistance from an architect or liturgical design consultant to implement some of the suggested improvements. I am available to assist with that effort, if so desired, and to answer any follow up questions you might have.

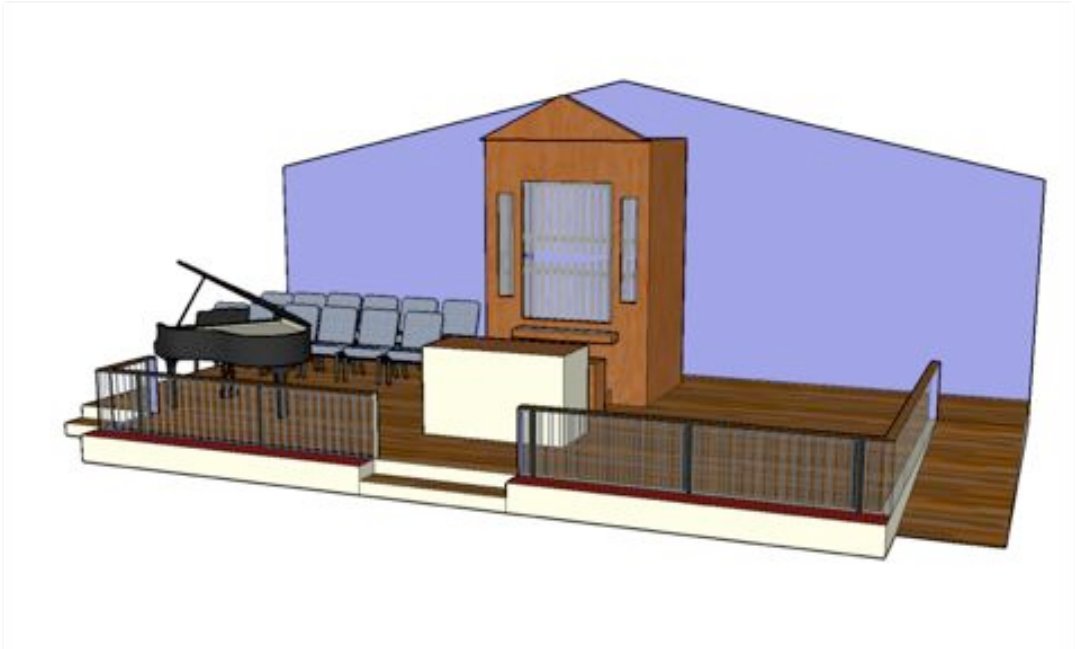
The following pages contain views of a quick study model I prepared to study arrangements of the chancel. The chairs and piano are stock models and are therefore much more detailed than the altar and organ, which are basically "massing" models. Viewers will need to use their imagination and place the pulpit and presiding minister as they see fit. (The purple wall is **not** a color recommendation.)



PLAN VIEW



BIRDSEYE VIEW



EYE LEVEL VIEW (STANDING)

EYE LEVEL VIEW (SEATED)

NOTE: These illustrations are with the organ on the level of the current platform. If installed in a pit, the organ would be one foot lower.