

FCCEJ CELEBRATING 150 YEARS OF SERVICE TO GOD AND COMMUNITY

First Congo Church Musicians “Make A Joyful Noise!”

Beautiful music has swelled the breeze for 150 years at the First Congregational Church of Essex Junction. Our current history consists of seven musical groups: our *Cherubs*, ages 3 through Kindergarten; *Joyful Noise*, grades one through six; *Men at First*, our men’s a capella choir; *Heavenly Harmony*, our ladies’ choir; the *Currier Hand Bell Choir*, playing three octaves of bells; *Finally at First*, our praise band and the *Sanctuary Choir*, our adult Choir. We are also very fortunate to have a wonderful organ and a magnificent grand piano to bring music into our lives.

In 1887, the gathered church paid our first organist and more than likely that person played a pump organ, an instrument where the player uses their feet to pump air through the pipes and plays at the same time. A pipe organ was purchased by the church membership in 1925 as a memorial to past members. In just two years, the \$5,000 raised paid for the fine Vermont Estey organ and the associated remodeling of the choir loft. The organ was dedicated on January 1, 1928. Our current organ was installed in 1984 at a cost of \$67,605, and has been upgraded several times since then.

In the early days of the church, hymns would have been lined with a music leader singing one verse and the congregation following. In 1930, the Men’s Parish League purchased hymnals for the church, and then did so again in 1951 with the help of the Dorcas Guild [a women’s charitable group] as well as the Ladies Social Union. The hymnals were replaced in 1965 by the Mudgett family, in memory of Edward William Mudgett and then again in 1990 by church members. Our New Century Hymnals replaced male images of God and updated some of the old fashioned language. With our tendency to purchase new hymn books and through our many musical groups, First Church strives to offer a variety of music so that all sorts of music lovers can come and celebrate God’s gift of music.

In the early 1900s, minstrel shows were held in the parish hall. In 1968, the church performed the Musical, *Carousel*, in the Hiawatha School gym. Today, in addition to the music made by our seven choirs and enjoyed on Sunday mornings, we strive to spread the gift of music to the community through talent shows and outside musical concerts, including the *Georgia Boys Choir*, *Duelly Noted* from Hamilton College, *Joe’s Big Band*, the *Onion River Band*, and Carolyn Bever and her violin students. We also share our musical talents with the community during the Memorial Day Remembrances, the Tree Lighting Ceremony and the Christmas concert at the Church of Latter Day Saints.

We are generally not strict literalists, but do firmly believe that everyone should “make a joyful noise unto the Lord.”

By Beth Volker and Rev. Mark Mendes