

AN INTERVIEW WITH DANIEL BURTON

Daniel Burton was our Church Organist and Composer-in-Residence for over a quarter of a Century. A gifted musician, he was more than able to maintain the excellence of our music program.

How and when were you first introduced to First Church?

I came to San Diego in 1973 looking for a church organist position and went through the yellow pages to find churches I thought might have good music programs. I called FUMC to introduce myself and asked if they anticipated having an opening for organist and was told that they were interviewing/auditioning right then. I joined the other 32 auditioners, as well as applying at two other churches in town. As it turned out, all three offered positions, but FUMC seemed to show the most potential.

What was your first impression of this church?

I had seen the church campus many times from the freeway, and when I experienced the church service, I was favorably impressed. The people were warm and appeared to appreciate good music.

Do you recall some of the first things you did at this church that might have some significance to the church or to you, personally?

Early in my tenure, I was able to convince the senior pastor and the various music committees that the organ was inadequate for such a major church, and we embarked on a program to upgrade and complete the instrument. During my first year, I gave theme concerts every month, and the years following continued every other month, with all revenue going to the organ fund. Eventually, Jerry Ryan offered to chair a major campaign, which was successful in raising enough funds to make the instrument the major force that it is today in San Diego's music life

Describe any incidents of interest that you recall and would like to tell about, concerning worship, building construction, or anything else.

The completion of the new organ was timed to coincide with the Western Jurisdictional Conference which met in San Diego to elect a new bishop. That was an amazing week, and the dedication service that was held late on the evening that the election was concluded was a most memorable event.

The many opportunities to present great music over the 30 years were important memories. Besides the semi-annual choral concerts, I presented annual organ concerts as well as solo presentations on harpsichord, harp, and piano. We dedicated the harpsichord with a Handel Concerto in F and the Poulenc Organ Concerto, with the USIU orchestra under Zoltan Rosznai. We premiered a concerto for harpsichord and organ with Phyllis Irwin. The choir and orchestra presented my oratorio, "Lux Sancta," in it's West Coast premier. The list is very, very long.

Is there anything else you would like to add? Little human interest incidents are always enjoyable to remember.

The evolution of the choir into a closely knit family was as wondrous an event as I ever expect to witness. When we were between directors, the depth and richness of the choir personnel was called forth, and the result was the emergence of a unified group of singers who cared about each other. Stan Wicks has continued to encourage this trend, and it is a marvelous thing to behold.