

100-year-old 'new' organ dedication set for Sunday

By EMILY STEHLE
Hernando Times Staff Writer

SPRING HILL — The ceremony that will take place at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church Sunday — the dedication of a restored 100-year-old pipe organ — will happen thanks to the efforts of the pastor of another church.

It was, says Rev. Ernest Bennett, St. Andrew's pastor, "something we hit on." He had been considering replacing his church's 12-year-old electric organ "that was almost on its last legs."

"I've always wanted to get a pipe organ," Bennett said. "But we didn't expect to get one — at least not so soon after we built the new church building."

THE MAN responsible for St. Andrew's find is Rev. Harold B. Bumpus of the St. Theresa Catholic Church. Bumpus had located the tracker organ through the Organ Clearing House of Harrisville, N.H. about three years ago and had it shipped to Spring Hill.

However, Bumpus didn't keep the pipe organ — built in 1883 for the Universalist Church in Brattleboro, Vt. by the Boston firm of Hook and Hastings — for his church (he got another, which he had restored and installed last summer). Sixteen months later, he offered the organ to Bennett.

"He wanted us to have it," Bennett said. "And I jumped. It was a fantastic deal . . . \$3,500."

"**I KNOW** A bargain when I see one," he added, beaming. It usually costs at least \$25,000 for a new electric organ, he said.

He consulted his congregation, and in October 1981 signed the contract for the restoration of the antique.

"We literally had no money for the project," Bennett said, adding that the 300-family congregation had raised \$200,000 just two years ago to build the church.

It took a little more than a year of fund-raising to come up with the \$35,000 to pay for the 1½ years of restoration work by Klug and Schumacher of Lakeland. Ninety-nine percent of the cost was donated by parishioners.

"**IT WAS** something we really wanted to do," Bennett said. "The best thing to happen was the new church building. This pipe organ helps to finish the building. I'd say, yes, it's (like the icing on the cake)."

Sunday's 10 a.m. service will be a triple celebration. The Right Rev. E. Paul Haynes, the bishop of the diocese of Southwest Florida, will be present for confirmation, followed by the pipe organ dedication. After the service, the congregation will break ground for a \$25,000 office complex, which will be built behind the church.



Hernando Times — CHERIE DIEZ

Father Ernest Bennett with 'new' 100-year-old organ.

Bennett said the pipe organ's history placed it at the lower church of St. Peter's Roman Catholic Church in Cambridge about 50 years ago. The black walnut encased organ was, according to an information sheet provided by the Organ Clearing House, still intact and in regular use in 1959.

BY 1977, it was replaced by an electric organ, and three years later, when it was removed, most of the pipework was ruined or had disappeared.

Once all the parts — there are 960 wood and metal pipes — were replaced and fitted in Lakeland, the organ was assembled, played, dismantled and then packed in wood boxes for the trip to Spring Hill.

The organ was reassembled and altered to fit the ceiling pitch of St. Andrew's. It took two weeks. Members of the congregation, rolling up their

sleeves, stripped the old varnish off the "pitch black" wood case. The color of the rich brown wood contrasts with the gold shine of the 19 exposed metal pipes.

"**THEY CUT** around the beams in the building," Bennett said. "We had to move the pews (from the west wall) to make room for the organ, which stands about 16 by 10 feet."

"It's an exciting instrument," Bennett said. "The sound is just fantastic. You won't believe it."

Bennett isn't alone in his enthusiasm for the new pipe organ. Jane Weinberg, a piano teacher who was asked to play at Sunday services, agreed on a temporary basis. Now, she says, it might be permanent.

"I've played on it for four Sundays," she said. "They've put this beautiful organ in that looks like it was made for this church. It's truly an organist's and a church's dream."