

Festina Choir History

By Norbert Hackman

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Norbert Hackman remembers back to about 1946 when Lucille Hackman, Norb's sister, started to play the organ in church during weekday masses or something special like First Friday and other days. There were two masses on Sunday.

Mrs. Slim Rothmeyer was also an organist for a few years after Slim came home from the war and until they moved to Calmar. Lucille played until August of 1950 when she got married and moved to Calmar in 1951.

When Lucille played she had me (Norbert) pump the organ, which was built in the choir loft. It was about eight square feet and made of wood boards on three sides. The keyboard and pipes were to the north, or the front of the church. The pump handle was on the east side. The handle stuck out about three feet and pumped up and down. I remember about two times up and down in five seconds or so. The organ would not play without being pumped.

Then in about 1958 or 1959 Casper Buchheit died and donated around \$3,000 for a new Hammond organ. It was a tube type and needed about three to five minutes to warm up. The first times we used it Roman Rausch of Calmer, a very good organ player, played for a special dedication mass. The people of Festina were really impressed and proud of the new organ.

Fr. John P. Smith was here at about that time and he put together an all men's choir. I was a member of that choir and we sang every Sunday for quite a few years. I think Lucy Massman was the organist at that time. After Lucille quit in 1950 we had a hard time getting girls to play. Some years St. Rose Convent would send sisters to Festina to teach and they could also play the organ. That was real nice when Lucy Massman started to help out. In the 1960s Lucy took over and played the organ full time.

The choir in the early 1960s was mostly women from the parish on Sundays and other times the girls from school. Music really was not that popular to have at all times. Mass was mostly a time when people paid attention to what the priest was doing because Latin was the language used and, people really did not know what the prayers were. It was time that the altar was turned around to face the people and prayers were in English. It's so much better now and music has become an important part of the mass.

When Fr. Patrick Geary became our pastor he loved music and the choir became very active again. Lucy Massman retired at this time and Elnore Hackman was our organist. Fr. Geary was only here a short time but we got started.

Fr. Ouderkirk liked music also. And he left it to Elnore Hackman pick all of the songs and arrangements. He was easy to work with.

Guitar mass became popular in our and other churches in northeast Iowa. Teens Encounter Christ for high school seniors became very popular in Calmar. Calmar hosts TEC every year.

Also, weekends in different towns for adults called Courcillo. Elnore and I made it to one in Lansing, Iowa. Msgr. Cletus Hawes was in the same class but, I didn't know him at the time.

Not only did music change, but face to face confession; Communion in the hand; sign of peace; drinking of wine to represent the blood of Christ and many other things. At first it was hugging instead of handshakes for the sign of peace. Also this is when lay people served as lectors and Eucharistic ministers which involved more people.

In 1993 Elnore was in the choir be herself to play and a thunder storm came upon us. Lightening hit somewhere on the church and blew out the organ. Ken Ehler was lecture at that mass and said he saw a ball of fire come from the organ. Edwin Kipp had knowledge on fixing electrical things and put in new tubes to make it work. Fr. Heineman said that was not good enough.

Fr. Donald Heineman sent Elnore to Manly, Iowa to buy a new organ. That store specialized in church supplies and musical instruments.

Also, sometimes in the 80's when we had choir practices for Christmas we would go caroling. We would pick a time when there was a full moon and after practice we would go around town and sing Christmas carols at the older people's homes. Norbert Hackman played his guitar and the rest of us would sing a Christmas song. After we got cold we would go to Richard and Dorita Kuennen's house for hot chocolate and warm up and visit for awhile. Those were real fun times.

The Festina choir stayed about the same for awhile. On January 31, 1998, Elnore passed away and left us with no organist again. Shortly after that Tom Elsbernd and his wife moved into their grandmother's house and she could play the organ and volunteered to do so. We thought we had the problem fixed. But after a couple of years he got a job somewhere else and they moved away. Again we had no one. So we started to hire woman where ever we could. At the present time we got a nice lady from Ossian, Iowa. Mrs. Lorraine Meyer. She is easy to sing with and it is working out nice.

When we have wedding's the couples hire who they want. At funerals they sometimes hire Jeanette Ditzenback of Decorah to play. Our church choir does the singing. Often the family wants to have a solo and hire whoever they want.