



Member Spotlight – Ken West

Ken West is a native of Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada and started piano lessons when he was eight. Their church had a special meeting on Tuesday afternoons where they learned about and prayed for Canadian missionaries living in India and Bolivia. He was asked to play piano for some of these meetings. His family was involved in the church, and Ken would sometimes go home and try to imitate the pianist. There were several pianists that did much to whet his appetite. In high school, he was playing organ at different services in town; however, he was so involved in practicing for Sunday that he was not putting the time in on the piano. His Dad wisely suggested that he take organ lessons instead.

As a junior in high school, Ken began studying organ with Mr. R.C. Bayley, a gifted organist who had studied in London. Mr. Bayley became a life-long friend as well as a beloved teacher. Ken's first paid position as organist came when he was 17.

After high school, he came to Greenville to attend Bob Jones University. He writes, "I was an organ major when I came to Bob Jones and was paying my way through school. I ran out of money after my second year, and I changed majors my junior year. As a young organ major, I believed I would have to teach music. That was one thing I could not see myself doing!" But he did teach! In fact, Ken taught in public schools in Illinois and in South Carolina for a total of 41 years!

By 1983, he had a deep yearning to play the organ again, but that desire seemed impossible since he and his wife, Lorena, had two daughters, and the family was established in Rockford, Illinois. Ken learned of a program where one could earn a graduate degree in church music in three summers plus some correspondence work. It had been years since he had been a music student, and he knew he needed refresher courses in music theory and music history; so, he came to BJU that summer to strengthen his craft as a musician.

The first day of classes, Dr. Gail Gingery saw him in the hall, and remembered him from his student years. Dr. Gingery said, "Ken, I need you to play for Chapel for summer school." Sitting at the organ that day, Ken says, "I knew I was 'HOME!" Dr. Gingery talked with Dr. Ed Dunbar about organ lessons for him, and Ken writes, "I knew who Dr. Dunbar was, but he had no idea of my background. I had picked up some bad habits over the years. At the first lesson Dr. Dunbar asked me what I had been playing as an organ major in the 1960s. I will never forget the look on his face when I said, 'Tu Es Petra' by Mulet!" At the end of the summer, through a marvelous set of circumstances, the Wests had sold their home in Illinois, bought a house here, and moved to Greenville. Ken says with a twinkle in his eye, "I finished my coursework and did my recital in 1986. It was exciting to play 'Tu Es Petra' on my recital!"

After receiving his graduate degree in music, Ken went back to teaching and used his music on the weekends. He served as organist in Inman (Inman United Methodist), Greenville (Second Presbyterian), and Greer (First Baptist Church). In 2017 he became organist in Rutherfordton, North Carolina (First Baptist Church).

Ken is a life-long learner. After receiving his undergraduate degree in Humanities in 1965, he earned multiple degrees including the Master of Education in Christian Education, Master of Science in Guidance and Counseling, Master of Music in Church Music, and Ed Specialist in Guidance and Counseling. Ken also holds the Service Playing and the Colleague of the American Guild of Organists (CAGO) certificates from the AGO.

When asked how his life as a church musician changed during the pandemic, he, like many of our colleagues, moved from live to virtual services. He provided music for the services, though there was no choir or congregation in the sanctuary. Those who know Ken, know that he hardly ever goes anywhere without Suzie – a beautiful 12-year-old Pomeranian. At the beginning of the

pandemic, she had been going to choir practice with Ken for several years. During Covid, she would go to church with him and sit on the first pew in the sanctuary. When live services resumed, she continued to go to church! She is so well-behaved that most people don't know she's there unless they pass her pew. He says, "There have been no adverse remarks and all I get are good comments."

Ken has been member of our chapter since the early 1990s. He "enjoys being in a group that has the same hopes that I have. I love the king of instruments, and it is a big part of my life. It is fun to encourage young people to have some of the experiences I have had."

He recounts two meaningful experiences in the recent past, and says, "In a musician's life, there are certain events that seem 'the ultimate.' In the early 2000s Greer's First Baptist got a large gift and decided to purchase a new organ. In January 2005, I laid my eyes on the beautiful 4-manual Allen that was ready to be installed in the church. I cannot describe how it felt to look at the organ that I would play every Sunday! Tom Hazelton came for the organ dedication concert, and it was a grand occasion. The second experience was playing a wedding this past year on the Fisk organ at Furman's Daniel Chapel. It was very exciting to just practice on that organ and try different stops before choosing ones I wanted for the service."

Ken has set a good standard for us – living and learning, following dreams, and being ready for what God brings our way.