

Casavant Organ Relocation — Frequently Asked Questions

The Agreement & Process

What is this agreement about?

The University of Alberta has reached an agreement with the Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Picture Butte, Alberta, to provide a permanent home for the 1978 Casavant pipe organ (Opus 3358) from Convocation Hall. The congregation will take ownership of the organ as Convocation Hall undergoes its renewal. The organ's relocation is necessary to restore full accessibility to the balcony level of the historic building.

Why is the organ being moved?

Convocation Hall's renewal is intended to enhance accessibility, increase seating capacity, and improve the experience of students, performers, and audience members. These accessibility and other improvements cannot be achieved while the organ remains in its current location. In addition, the university has not had a dedicated organ program for at least 10 years. The University is committed to finding the organ a new home where it will be cared for, played regularly, and honoured for its significance.

How did you choose the Netherlands Reformed Congregation?

The University applied clear, consistent selection principles to all candidates:

- The organ needed to go to a partner where it would be used regularly, not housed privately or collected.
- The partner needed to have the infrastructure and resources to professionally receive, install, and maintain an instrument of this scale and calibre.
- The partner needed to commit to honouring the organ's status as a war memorial.

The congregation in Picture Butte met all these criteria. They maintain an active, weekly worship tradition that uses the organ as the sole instrument to lead congregational singing, have demonstrated the capacity to properly install and maintain the instrument, and are fully committed to the organ's formal rededication.

Were other organizations considered?

Yes. The University received a small number of serious expressions of interest from various organizations. The congregation in Picture Butte was the one that fully met the University's criteria and completed the process to an agreement. This reflects how rare and demanding the necessary capacity actually is — very few organizations anywhere have the venue, resources, and established musical tradition required to take on an instrument of this scale.

Location & Access

Why Picture Butte? It's five hours from Edmonton.

Distance was not a selection criterion. We prioritized demonstrated capacity for active, regular use. No Edmonton-area organization came forward with a suitable venue and the resources to properly receive, install, and maintain an instrument of this scale. Once the congregation's facility is complete, the organ will return to regular active use, ensuring it serves the musical life that it was designed for.

Will the public be able to visit or hear the organ in Picture Butte?

Yes. The congregation has confirmed that their services are open to the public. The organ will be heard regularly during weekly worship.

Can University of Alberta students and faculty still access the organ?

The congregation has expressed openness to supporting access to the organ by academic staff in the Department of Music, for scholarly research purposes. This preserves an ongoing connection between the instrument and the academic community it has long served.

How do we know that the congregation's sanctuary will be built and the organ installed?

The congregation is fully committed to developing a special worship space with the organ as its centre. They have committed to transitioning the organ to their new sanctuary, and are excited to play and hear it often as part of their worship. We are confident that the organ will be an integral part of the congregation for generations to come.

The Memorial

Is Casavant Opus 3358 a war memorial?

Yes. An independent assessment by Dr. Robert Summerby-Murray, commissioned by the University, confirmed that the 1978 Casavant organ is a war memorial. The organ was installed to honour members of the University of Alberta community who died in the First and Second World Wars.

What happens to the memorial if the organ leaves campus?

The organ itself is the memorial, and its memorial status travels with it. Once installed in Picture Butte, Casavant Opus 3358 will be formally rededicated, fully supported by the congregation. This rededication will preserve and publicly recognize the organ's role as a war memorial.

Separately, the University is enhancing the existing war memorial at the entrance to Convocation Hall as part of the Hall's renewal. The honour rolls — bearing the names of members of our community who served and who fell in the First and Second World Wars — will be made more prominent, and the memorial will be expanded to include conflicts since the Second World War. The Royal Canadian Legion and the veteran community will be consulted in the design of this on-campus enhancement.

Will there be a rededication ceremony for the organ in Picture Butte?

Yes. The University is committed to formally rededicating Casavant Opus 3358 once it is installed in its new home.

Financial Terms

Who is paying for what?

This is a stewardship transfer, not a sale.

- **University responsibility:** The University is covering the cost of professional disassembly and preparation of the organ for transport.
- **Congregation responsibility:** The congregation is responsible for all shipping costs, reinstallation, and any necessary infrastructure.
- **Ownership transfer:** Ownership of the organ transfers at nominal cost (\$1), consistent with a transfer of stewardship between non-profit and charitable organizations.

Why is the transfer at a nominal cost and not a sale price?

This reflects the nature of the arrangement. Both the University and the congregation are non-profit, mission-driven organizations. The transfer recognizes that the congregation is taking on stewardship of an instrument of significant cultural and spiritual value, not purchasing a commercial asset. The University's primary concern is ensuring the organ is cared for and honoured, not generating revenue.

The Congregation

Who is the Netherlands Reformed Congregation?

The Netherlands Reformed Congregation of Picture Butte is a Christian congregation with an active musical tradition. They maintain a worship space where services are open to the community. Their commitment to the organ's stewardship and formal rededication was central to the University's decision.

Is it appropriate for a public war memorial to go to a church group/congregation?

The University's selection process was guided by clear, evenly applied principles – not by the beliefs or theology of any particular organization. Our role was to find a partner who would use, maintain, and honour the instrument according to those principles. The congregation in Picture Butte met every criterion: they have a suitable venue, demonstrated capacity, and genuine commitment to the memorial's rededication.

Convocation Hall Renewal

When will the organ leave Convocation Hall?

The organ will be disassembled and relocated as Convocation Hall's renewal is underway. Specific dates will be shared as the project timeline is finalized.

Will Convocation Hall still have an organ after the renewal?

No. The renewal project does not include installation of a new organ. However, the hall will be enhanced with improved accessibility, increased seating capacity, and a strengthened war memorial at the entrance. The University's Department of Music will continue to have access to the University's other keyboard instruments – including a fortepiano, harpsichord, and two mobile positive organs (a Casavant and a James Louder), which remain on campus. They may also make arrangements to access the fully functional and tuned pipe organ, which currently resides in the chapel at the U of A Augustana Campus.