



# Worship, Music & Ministry

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Compiled by Eric Dundore



## Editor's Note

Dear Stationary Sojourners,

In our current situation (I write this in mid-April) we are all in a quandary about how our life works during a pandemic and when we will get back to the normal worshipful arts – making that is our passion. Doing our jobs without the collaboration of other human beings around us is so stifling and frustrating, but reaching out to our colleagues, friends and family keeps our connections strong and saves our souls. Please continue to communicate with as many others as possible and share your gifts whenever you can and with as many as you can. Music keeps hope alive!

It was suggested to me that for this Summer issue we look past the liturgical and repertoire-centered matter that we usually present to a more topical set of possibilities, “Social Justice Springing from Worship.” We wish to spur you and your congregations toward taking the words and music from your weekly services and making a difference in your community – especially those where you see a definite need. There are so many avenues to approach these issues – so many perspectives and ways to direct your action. We have taken a few and given you stories that describe what one person or congregation has done and YOU can mold the basic concept to what you think best for your situation.

First, we are so honored to have the Rev. Traci Blackmon, Associate General Minister for Justice and Local Church Ministries in the United Church of Christ, here to call us to action. Even with her overly busy schedule during this uneasy time she wants to encourage us and drive us forward. Many thanks, Rev. Blackmon!

So many other musicians and artists have been generous in sharing their expertise and actual pieces of social justice with us in this issue and we cannot thank them enough. Our UCCMA president completes her three-part series on vespers services in this issue and we also read about some of our choir members’ journeys and why they remain active in our groups. Think about how you could be moved to respond.

We all appreciate tremendously the gifts Carolyn Winfrey Gillette has shared with us for this entire year of journals. Her hymns make us think more about what it is that we are singing and how our faith can be expressed through the music we love so well. Members, please keep using and supporting CWG’s hymn-writing as we now move on to others who share their creativity and faith with us. God bless you, Carolyn!

Stay safe, be healthy, and think about ways we can make a difference in our communities!

Eric Dundore

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## Greetings Friends:

I am honored and so very excited to offer words in this Social Justice Issue of the UCCMA Journal. Social Justice Movements are a long-standing response to war, capitalism, political and social inequality. Although social justice is often categorized as a political agenda, such movements have used the arts, particularly music, as a way of inviting broad-based participation and community engagement into the forefront and reminding us that at their core Social Justice Movements are spiritual proclamations.



So integral is the presence of music in protest that one cannot separate certain social causes from the music that infuses communal resistance. For instance, the Blues helped shape the political consciousness of Black communities emerging from Reconstruction in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The Jazz of 1960's nurtured the Freedom Movement of the 1960's, and we cannot forget the role of Negro Spirituals and Gospel that have charted the course for liberation from slavery to now. One can rarely sing We Shall Overcome without evoking vivid memories of the Civil Rights marches of the South. From the drumbeats of anti-apartheid in South Africa to the rhythmic chants of the Occupy Movement to the streets of Ferguson, movements have a melody. What songs come to mind if you allow yourself to remember the anti-Vietnam protest?

Music is the heartbeat of Movements. In this moment of global crisis, I am grateful for the offerings of UCCMA Journal that will help bear perpetual witness to a hurting world that the beat of justice goes on!

With Hope & Faith,

Rev. Traci D. Blackmon

*Until the lion tells the story, the hunter will always be the hero. ~ West African Proverb*

**Rev. Traci Blackmon** is the Associate General Minister of Justice & Local Church Ministries for The United Church of Christ and Senior Pastor of Christ The King United Church of Christ in Florissant, MO.

As a featured voice on many regional, national, and international platforms, Rev. Blackmon's life work focuses on communal resistance to systemic injustice. Her response in Ferguson to the killing of Michael Brown resulted in national and international recognition, gaining her many audiences spanning the breadth of the White House to the Carter Center to the Vatican. Her work is now featured in several Ferguson Uprising documentaries. Appointed to the Ferguson Commission by Governor Jay Nixon and to the President's Advisory Council on Faith-Based Neighborhood Partnerships for the White House by President Barack Obama, Rev. Blackmon is a recipient of the NAACP Rosa Parks Award. Rev. Blackmon currently resides in both St. Louis, MO and Cleveland, OH and is the proud mother of three adult children: Kortni Devon, Harold II, and Tyler Wayne Blackmon.

*"I speak for the lions. And we are many!" ~ Rev. Traci D. Blackmon*

# Social Justice Springing from Worship

By Robin Joyce Miller

As I write this, we are in the midst of the Coronavirus pandemic which often feels apocalyptic. Yet God is still speaking. Christians across the globe are scrambling for new and creative ways to worship, mostly through technology. It's good to know that we don't have to be in church to worship God. Webster dictionary says, "**Worship** is to honor with extravagant love and extreme submission." The most powerful way to worship God is probably through our living.

Social Justice in Worship is a controversial topic. Justice usually has to do with fairness in the societal laws. In order to have social justice, we must first believe that people of all walks of life deserve to be treated fairly. Many people don't feel this should be the business of the church. They argue that social justice is a movement that is being forced upon them. In fact, some are leaving churches that present these initiatives. I'm encouraged that UCC has made a conscious effort to take this on.

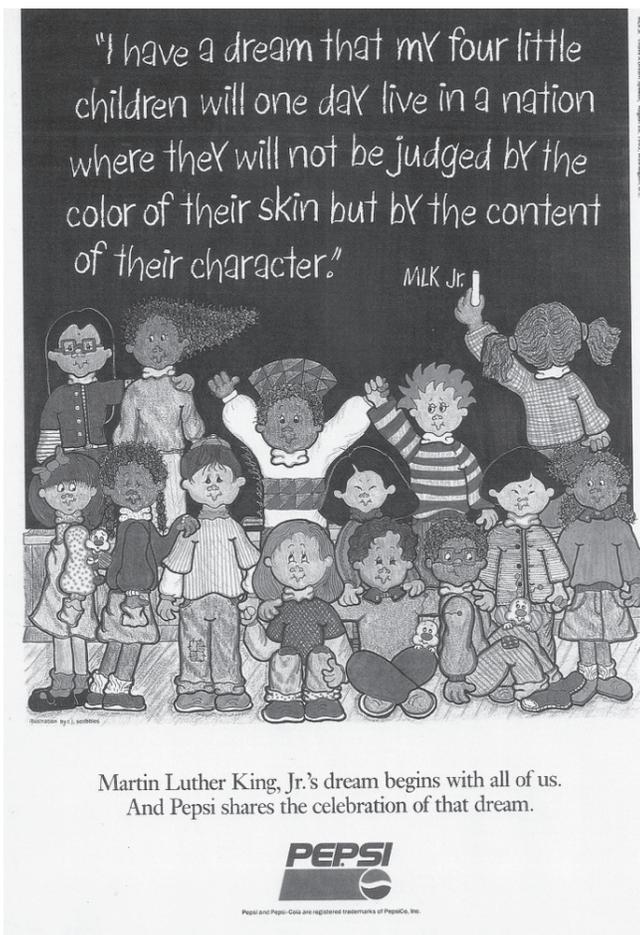
However, this has always been a prominent focus in African American churches across the country. The Civil Rights Movement was birthed in black southern Baptist churches. As a people, social justice is woven into more sermons than not. I'm sure, this is why Dr. King stated, "Sunday at 11:00 is the most segregated hour in this nation."

I have attended St. Albans Congregational Church, UCC, an African American church in NYC, since I was 4 years old. This church encouraged cultural pride. Former Ambassador Andrew Young, who was with Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. when he was shot on the terrace of the Lorraine Hotel, attended my church when he lived in NYC back in the 60's. Several church members including my father were present in Washington, DC, when Dr. King delivered his famous speech. I learned to care about social justice, as a youth, in church.

Christ addresses social justice in his conversation with a religious lawyer of the day, who wanted to know how to have eternal life. The Pharisee whose expertise was law, was proud to quote the two greatest commandments "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and your soul, and with all your strength and will all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself. (Luke 10: 27-28) But then the lawyer asked, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus then related the story of the Good Samaritan. When he finished the story, he asked the lawyer, "Which of these three, do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?" The lawyer responded, "The one who showed mercy." Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10:36-37).

Jesus, also, clearly speaks of social justice, when he tells us whom we should care for in order to inherit the kingdom. In the Parable of the Sheep and Goats he explains to the sheep on his right what they did. "For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." (Matt. 25:34-36) "Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me." (Matt. 25:40)

The story ending for the goats is not so favorable. You can read Matthew 25:41-43 to find out their fate.



Pepsi Ad

In this fast connecting world, the virus is proof that we are all neighbors and all connected. I was blessed to teach in a NYC school with a global population. Many continents and countries were represented. I enjoyed a 30-year career at PS. 108 in the Bronx. My educational journey began as a special education teacher. After 15 years, I took a yearlong visual art sabbatical. The next 14 years spent as an art educator were amazing. Respect for the many different cultures of the world expanded my perspective and transformed my life. Learning to speak Spanish with families, who made up 35% of the population, bridged social and even trust gaps. The variety of foods and fascinating discussions about family traditions enriched students and teachers alike.

During that time, I created multicultural cartoon characters under the pseudonym rj. scribbles that promoted peace and racial harmony. In 1992, a Pepsi ad honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was published in several magazines.

Let's share the beauty of God's love for variation. Every day we see variety in the beauty of nature. There are so many species of both plants and animals. The colors, hues, shades and tints that can be viewed in the natural world are mindboggling. Our churches are absolutely places to celebrate and respect cultural variety. Through music, art, and spoken word, the church can flourish. When we invite people, who are different from ourselves to worship with us, we learn to honor unity in diversity.

I am a visual artist, so I perceive the world through that lens. Church bulletins, Sunday school books and other printed materials can depict images that reflect the world and God's universal love. If we consider that Jesus was born in the Middle East, he wouldn't have European features. He most likely resembled the people who inhabit that territory today. Variations of a European Jesus dominate the world. Maybe we could invite children to draw what they think Jesus looks like. It would be interesting to see if they copy visible images or see themselves in the image of Jesus.

I remember going to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, as a child, and feeling totally disconnected from the religious Italian Renaissance paintings. The stained glass in Catholic churches was always decorated with European images of Jesus, angels and saints. It was hard to imagine God caring about a young black girl like me. Why weren't there any angels of color? Were there no good people of color in God's world?

My brother traveled to Ethiopia returning with photographs of Coptic Christian art. It delighted me to see a humbly dressed, brown Jesus with curly hair. The images were simple, yet lovely. I decided to honor this depiction of Jesus in a book for families entitled, "Who Do You Say That I Am? – A Man Called Jesus." Rev. Dr. David Purdy and Pamela Chatterton Purdy are friends who inspired the title and encouraged the work. I wasn't comfortable calling my paintings "The Ethiopian Jesus Collection" because Jesus was not Ethiopian. Pamela suggested, "Let the work ask Jesus' question! – Who Do You Say That I Am?"

In 2008, after purchasing a vacation home on Cape Cod, I decided to check out the nearest UCC church. West Parish of Barnstable, UCC is literally a 3-minute drive from our house. When I walked up to this historical white New England Church, I was alone and



*The Last Supper from the Ethiopian Jesus Collection*

rather uncomfortable. My husband, Jim, did not accompany me. As I approached the entrance, one of the oldest women in the church, Silja, took one look at me, linked her arm in mine and said, "You, are sitting with me!" Totally unexpected! The parishioners warmly welcomed me into the fold.

In 2013, after we retired, we began spending more time on the Cape. When the pastors realized that my husband and I had created a poetry/art book depicting important moments in African American History, I was asked to speak in the pulpit. That was a first for me. Since then, I have spoken in several Cape Cod UCC churches. Diversity in music can, also, add to the quality of worship. Unable to bring my NYC church choir to Cape Cod, I played recordings of African American Gospel music.

Pastor Reed Baer and his wife, Assoc. Pastor Christie Burns of West Parish invited us to a dinner party at their home when UCC President, John Dorhauer, came to discuss his White Privilege program. Reed led three White Privilege sessions after the church services. Jim and I attended the last one and knew we would be asked to share our thoughts. The night before, I created a poem to address the issue. I believed that the best approach would not be to talk about what *White Privilege* is, but what **NOT** having *Privilege* means. This felt less confrontational. The purpose was to help parishioners gain insight and not to incite resentment.

### **Never Had the Privilege**

[Instrumental Music – Nobody Knows the Trouble I've Seen]

Never had the privilege  
To sail to liberty  
We traveled as ship cargo  
No chance of being free.

Never had the privilege  
To have just one fine man  
My husband could just watch me scream  
Master takes me - cause he can

Once we had the privilege  
After s-l-a-ver-y  
During Reconstruction  
To rise - Cause we were free

But then the southern breeze  
Bore strange and swinging fruits  
Poplar trees bleeding  
From the leaves down to their roots

Never had the privilege  
To rise up and be free  
Paralyzed by the thought  
Of claiming liberty

Never had the privilege  
To struggle on the land  
To claim it as my very own  
Only sharecropped for the man.

Never had the privilege  
To become Mrs. Gladys Height  
My name was always  
“Come here girl, I’m calling **YOU!**  
That’s right.”

Never had the privilege  
To eat at the Five & Dime  
But I could wash the dishes  
And scrub the floor just fine.

Never had the privilege  
When traveling on a bus  
To find a decent restroom  
Cause I ain’t white enough.

Never had the privilege  
To see someone like me  
When I was just a child  
Be respected on TV

Then we had the privilege  
As Obama - President  
And a person they call Oprah  
This must be evident  
That race is not an issue  
Not even a concern

*What’s with this **Black Lives Matter** stuff?  
It’s wrong and it’s divisive  
America’s not racist  
These rebels are misguided.*

Is it a law or a privilege that a person is  
presumed innocent until proven guilty?  
Hmm?

Well, never had the privilege  
To prove innocence or guilt  
My black skin was the evidence  
For which my blood was spilt.

Never had the Privilege!  
Never had the Privilege!

I found it easy to reveal my insecurities about being of African descent, as a child growing up in a country that devalued people of color. One of my works describes my perspective of life watching the Civil Rights Movement unfold on my black and white TV screen. This slide show presentation is entitled, *Restoring My African Soul*. Relating my story drew people in on an emotional level and could be more easily digested, if accusatory comments were left unspoken. Church is a good place to develop social awareness, even social justice thinking, when keeping the Holy Spirit in the forefront of everyone’s mind.

One of the Cape Cod churches, not UCC, is involved in the “Building a Bigger Table” initiative. The slogan goes, “When you have more than you need, build a longer table, not a higher wall.” One of the members is hosting a family (husband, wife and baby) from Ghana. The fund paid for their asylum along the Mexican border. The husband is a chef and wishes to eventually open an African restaurant. We have shared time and resources with this cause.

I do not bring up politics in my talks. However, it is interesting how today’s political atmosphere and my study of African American History influenced the poem, *The Ancestors Speak*, that I leave with you.



**Robin Joyce Miller** was born in New York City. She received a B.S. in early childhood education from Baruch College and an M.S. in learning disabilities from Lehman College. While studying guidance counseling at Fordham University, she decided to study fine art at a variety of schools including the New York School of Interior Design, Parson’s School of Design, Manhattanville College, College of New Rochelle and LaGuardia Community College’s Sabbatical Program for teachers.

Robin retired from the NYC school system after a little more than 30 successful and joyous years of teaching.

During her years as a teacher of visual arts, Robin was honored by both NYC and NY State Region 8 Art Educator of the Year. She has conducted art workshops for teachers across the city in many venues including the Metropolitan Museum of Art and MOMA – the Museum of Modern Art.

Robin has also developed as a professional artist, author, poet and public speaker. She is currently a resident artist at the Zion Union Heritage Museum in Hyanis, MA. Miller creates mixed media collage works that have been exhibited in a few museums. Her available books include *A Humble Village*, *Who Do You Say That I Am – A Man Called Jesus* and *The Faithful Journey – From Slavery to Presidency*.

Today Robin and James speak about African American themes including racial matters. The Millers have residences in Bronx, NY and Marstons Mills, MA.

Robin’s artwork is available at [www.robinjoycemiller.com](http://www.robinjoycemiller.com).

## The Ancestors Speak

[Instrumental Music: Blessed Assurance]

As I rest, I am restless  
I am silent, but voices from the Ancestors speak  
They won't allow me to be still  
Startled to an awakened state  
This very night

They push through with their pain  
They weave their thoughts into mine  
They were once the enslaved  
They are the Africans  
They have maintained a humble pride  
Based on faith  
Even when not allowed  
The honor of dignity

They want all to know  
That humble pride  
That faith  
That dignity  
Have been present in their prayers  
Present in the music  
Invades the syncopation of jazz  
Delves deep within the sorrow of the blues  
Resonates through the rhythms of Gospel  
Erupts like a force in the vibrant voices  
In the harmonious melodies  
Of the soulful singers and musicians  
That cannot be not imitated  
By those who chose to erase  
Who refuse to acknowledge.

The Ancestors are saddened by  
Those of a generation  
Who speak shame through their actions  
Whose thoughts rush to fear  
Who travel with the luggage of doubt  
For the wise ones understand shame and fear and doubt

They hold the knowledge of the past  
They remember the land, the soil  
The earth that gave rise to the world  
They remember the time  
A time when their people were rich  
Not with a richness that robs and rules  
Not with the richness that steals  
From the poor  
And savages the less fortunate  
But a wealth that shares  
Because its composition is  
An endless sanctuary  
Of love and faith

They remember the Most Powerful  
The Spirit that speaks only truth  
They understand that real power  
Has never been in their weak fragile hands  
But remains with the Most High



*The Tribe from the Ethiopian Jesus Collection*

They have been patient, longsuffering  
Even through the unspeakable  
The world has tormented them much  
Yet  
They understand  
He is still speaking

The Ancestors beckon us  
To rush to Him  
To be strong  
To hold fast to His power  
For the times are not easy  
They never have been  
They never will be.

*His will*  
Will prevail  
*His rock is safe*  
*His ship will never sink*  
No matter the trials  
No matter who *thinks*  
They are in charge

The Evil One today  
Does not rule  
His power is false  
It shifts from day to day  
On sinking sand  
On greatness that never was.  
The Ancestors remember the time  
Of Pharaoh and his false sense of  
Power and truth  
He was no match for the Lord then  
He is no match today.  
The Lord loves and protects his people.

The Ancestors remind us of this  
As they watch  
They tell us to remain strong,  
Even resonant in our voices  
To the one who cradles this world  
In His hands  
Even in these sin-filled, sick  
And menacing times.

Listen to the Ancestors  
**Have Faith!**

# Sacred Dance Impels Social Justice and Action

By John West

**S***acred Spaces, Body, Movement and Worship*<sup>1</sup>, a webinar I presented for the Association of Consultants for Liturgical Space in May, 2019 was subtitled “Dance and the Performing Arts in Worship Environments.” My research for that webinar produced information and perspective that revealed worship or liturgy (the work of the people) as a tool for equity and social justice in the European pre-Christian era. And how wonderfully sacred dance enabled this tool to be so effective when cultural mores and laws could not.

## The Sacred Dance Floor

An often enviable and longed for seating level for theatre goers is “orchestra.” To some degree, like first class seats on an airliner, these are seats available only to the socially or economically “privileged.” None know this better than young dance and theatre students who, even if they work the venue as ushers, can only claim seats in the upper balcony as their recompense once everyone else has been seated. Orchestra (“dance floor”) in the ancient Greek amphitheatre was where chorus, actors and musicians interacted; the circular space where choreography was performed; “the dancing floor, based on threshing-floors which were rimmed to keep the grain in. At harvest time dance figures easily followed the form of the circular rim or cut in quadrants.”<sup>2</sup> Who were these dancers in the ancient Greek theatre?

In the streets of a city like Dionysia there were socially marginalized professional acrobats, actors, and members of dance choruses in dramatic presentations. In this guise they “were paid performers, but as ministers of the god Dionysus they were held in high regard”<sup>3</sup> and not devalued as “professionals,” e.g. the equivalent of slaves, freemen or foreigners. Playwrights like Thespis, Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides were both poets and choreographers; a few even danced in their own works. Looking to underscore through the dances in their tragedies the emotional setting of the plot or to heighten the drama, Aeschylus and Euripides would probably have been my closest artistic fellows in what I perceive and understand as the “liturgy” of the tragedy. The Greek amphitheatre was

a sacred venue of worship during the feast of “Dionysos Eleutheros.”<sup>4</sup> From the 3rd century B.C.E., “The Artists of Dionysus” became a “union” with religious overtones for these liturgical performers; the group had its own shrine and there held annual meetings and sacred ceremonies.<sup>5</sup> So even then there was a social justice aspect to Sacred Dance that “liturgy” could mitigate. Not until the Roman period do we see a decline in the respect for dance as ritual.<sup>6</sup> Parallel social constraints figure into the development of the prayer and worship expression of African American culture known as “gospel,” a faith-based celebration of freedom and social justice.

## Dancing the Faith

The music and worship that we identify as “gospel” varies according to the culture and social background of the people involved. It embodies the true meaning of the term “liturgy,” the work of the people. Embracing “gospel” prayer and worship aligns the community of prayer with the once “invisible institution”<sup>7</sup> of the African-American church that gathered in secret places identified only by coded words or broken tree limbs to celebrate the dream of freedom; to touch the broadest range of worshippers. In the spirit of the biblical Hebraic use of soul, “nephesh,” no part of the worshipping community can be invisible.<sup>8</sup> Gathered in worship and prayer, with “illuminated heads and warm hearts,” the assembly becomes soulful and whole. Gospel prayer and worship is an experience enriched by the Black rural and urban working classes who, like their African ancestors, refused to separate the sacred from the daily, the secular from the divine. This is the full-bodied worship of those gathered in praise and thanksgiving to God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit. Gospel music, which includes the Spirituals, was born from the African-American experience, but has become truly ecumenical and global. The development of Bluegrass Gospel, Celtic Gospel, Soul Gospel, and Reggae Gospel serve as examples.

Scholars of the religious practices of African-Americans repeatedly note that our culture’s expression of the Christianity we learned to embrace during slavery was intricately connected to our quest for and achievement of freedom. When life was so

often oppressive, whether in slavery or in the poverty of the urban experience, the opportunity to “have a good time in the Lord” was a welcomed respite whenever it was available. The stories about the Hebrew people and their ultimate liberation from slavery translated into the hope that someday, somehow, we, too, would be free. The identification of God in Jesus who knew poverty, pain and even death by “hanging on a tree,” gave them hope. Jesus’ victory over death gave them hope that they, too, could “overcome.” The promise of a better life in the New Jerusalem was real, whether in this earthly time and space or in their transition into Paradise. That hope and faith lives as vibrantly today as it did in early 17th, 18th, and 19th century America. One scholar recalls the invocation of a “wise deacon” in his church who prayed, “Lord, fix the situation, but even if you don’t fix the situation, fix me.”<sup>9</sup> Worshipping in this mode, congregants came together thirsting for the soul-quickening presence of God among them; they asked God to be the protective fence around them as they traveled through the challenges of daily life; they celebrated the blessings of God’s Word. Together they prayed, sang, danced in the Spirit. They rejoiced with one another in thanksgiving for the protection and blessings that God continued to give them. In the end, the assembly endeavored to leave the worship space in the freedom and peace of the Lord.

In 2013, I crafted the movement and setting for a Black Culture liturgy during the annual Religious Education Congress of the Archdiocese of Los Angeles. All of the characteristics and attributes of “gospel” worship and prayer were proclaimed in a monition by the presider before the prelude which drew a multicultural/multiracial assembly into a “Spirit-full” experience of Eucharist.<sup>10</sup> In that prelude a danced narrative choreography about the “thirst” of our enslaved ancestors for the hope and release of worship through the “invisible institution” overlaid the lyrics of “My Soul is Thirsting” [Rawn Harbor]. In the dance they steal away in small groupings until they can meet in the secret place marked by broken branches. The path is danced by two other women who lead the way to the preacher man who reveals the Bible and proclaims the Word. He dances for them the

way to freedom in the Gospel as another group of dancers stands ready to lead the entrance processional with flaming incense braziers. These dancers embody the hymn “Jesus Be A Fence Around Me”<sup>11</sup> and lead the liturgical procession into the worship space with all of the assembly singing. The “fire has been lit”; the theme of social justice has been set into place by the power of sacred dance in its liturgical mode.<sup>12</sup>

## Creator Spirit as Choreographer

Theologian Elizabeth Johnson writes:

...Scientist and religious thinker Arthur Peacocke suggests that a fitting image for the Creator Spirit would be that of a choreographer of an unfinished dance, ingeniously improvising steps for a piece that requires the creativity of the dancers to complete. The relation is not one of dominating or commanding power over, but one of reverence, empowering love...

This does not exclude the enormous amounts of violence, entropy, and suffering that exists throughout the cosmos. Stars are born and die, species appear and disappear due to natural catastrophe, individuals know debilitating pain. We may well wonder how Love could be empowering such a messy and at times tragic arrangement, made more so by the advent of conscious human beings with our historical propensity to sin, to hurt others...

What can be ventured is that it has something to do with the nature of love. Love grants autonomy to the beloved and respects this, all the while participating in the joy and pain of the other’s destiny. It vigorously cares and works for and urges the beloved toward his or her own well-being, but never forces...

About the Creator Spirit this can be said: loves bodies, loves to dance. The whole complex, material universe is pervaded and signed by her graceful vigor.<sup>13</sup>

## Show Me Your Face



Her perspective about the divine impelling of the arts, especially of the dance, echoes in much of the contemporary and popular religious music calling us to love, compassion and a sense of global justice. As a choreographer I have been moved to complement some of this with dance, taking the music even a bit beyond the lyrics for viewers. As our world began to fall into a kind of tailspin, Kirk Franklin’s *My World Needs You* seemed a logical beginning, a kind of call to worship for my *Dancing Festival of Lessons and Carols* concert.<sup>14</sup>

*Show me your face  
Fill up this space  
My world needs you right now  
My world needs you right now  
I can't escape  
Being afraid  
Fill me with you right now  
My world needs you right now*

*Powerful doubt  
Bring with it a sound  
That points us to you right now  
Erase substitutes right now  
Fix what I see  
And God please fix me  
My world needs you right now  
Let us see you right now*

Without the trappings of “costumes,” presenting the entire Company in select groupings embodying the pleas and supplications of this emotionally gripping piece of music set the context for all else that followed: we needed Emmanuel now to help us through the storms and tribulations already present in 2017. The completed dance underscored our need for one another and the necessity of really seeing each other in our daily encounters. The need to “show me your face” was insistent on many levels.



*Every heart in the world, God, needs you to rescue  
Storms have come and torn our hearts in two  
We need you*

*Storms may come but when we call your name  
All things change  
Kingdoms fall one thing  
Forever reigns is your name  
The anger that holds me in my pain stays the same  
Oh how sweet to know that your great name  
Will never change<sup>15</sup>*

*continued next page*



A similar choreographic invitation to embody the sacred call for social justice came this March when the dancers and I were asked to create a piece for a concert thematically celebrating women composers in sacred music. The title of one of the songs was familiar enough, but its new setting pushed us to deliver an entirely different product. “Motherless Child” began with a familiar melody and first two verses, but soon ValLimar Jansen, the songstress and composer, called the audience into participation by getting them to stomp their feet in a sympathetic journey with the women and events referenced in the lyrics and embodied in movement on the stage.

**Verse 3**

*The rain won't come no more  
And nothing will grow  
That's why I'm on this trail of tears  
Miles of sorrow & woe  
And now I find no welcome  
But where shall I go  
I'm a long ways from home*

**Verse 4**

*Walking with my children & all I could pack  
Forced to flee from all that violence, poverty & lack  
And now you're telling me, I must go back  
But I'm a long way from home*



**Bridge**

*Where are the true believers,  
Where are true believers  
Where are the true believers  
Where are the true believers  
Welcome me, true believers  
I'm The Stranger; to true believers  
I'm a long ways from home*



**Guitar Solo**

**Bridge**

*Where are the true believers  
I'm thirsty, true believers  
Where are the true believers  
I'm hungry, true believers  
Where are the true believers  
I AM a friend, to believers  
I'm a long ways from home*

A soloist danced the lament of the first two verses but later was joined by two other women who, with head wraps indicative of any number of cultures beyond the commerce of the West, unveiled the presence of women and children who had been in the news and without a real presence for too many weeks. The movements made the desperation, tragedy, and mendicant aspects of their lives so very palpable. Once again, through sacred dance, the invisible was being made visible. The Creator Spirit was using the grace of the dance to disclose the messiness and pain of the pain of the times and simultaneously move us toward a love of one another and the stranger.



By the publication of this article, it will have been two years since first I addressed the theme of social justice in this journal from a sacred dance point of view and in the UCC perspective.<sup>16</sup> Three pages into the article I linked sacred dance in liturgy to the third challenge of the UCC's Mission Statement, "To seek justice and liberation for all."<sup>17</sup> It was a tertiary element then; it is primary and central this time. Some of what I wrote, however, bears repeating.

At the end of the closing liturgy for a conference on mission for the Presbyterian Church, a young African woman, a pastor's wife from one of the central or West African nations, approached my wife and me. She thanked us for the gift of our ministry and disclosed that she did not dance. Of course she danced, I said, thinking that she was merely being modest or unduly complimentary. But she, in turn, began to explain that unfortunately she did not. In the process of evangelization, the missionaries had taught her people that dancing was evil. Tearfully she began to say, however, that our ministry had spiritually given her permission to reclaim an aspect of her own identity that had been taken away from her as a result of her family's conversion to Christianity.

Despite what the missionaries had taught her family, there was no real division between her exuberant Christian faith and her natural desire to dance. Telling her that the dance was evil eventually translated into a perception that as an African woman she was somehow evil. In order to be godly and Christian, she had to become like the Europeans in her aesthetic and cultural mores. She had to embrace the very unnatural division between body and soul. She could not and had not until this time come whole to the feast of the Lord.

Africa and other non-Westernized areas of the world make no distinction between the secular and sacred aspects of the human experience. Bringing everything to God is a cultural given for Native Americans, the multiple cultures of the Pacific Ocean, the Middle East, central and eastern Asia, and of most of Africa. In the words of a Yoruba proverb, "Where there is no human being, there is no divinity." It is strangely resonant with Nietzsche's "I would only believe in a god who could dance." The act of the incarnation is not a leap in logic or a leap of faith. It is a daily reality of many people made visible in what the Western Church chooses to call ritualized movement, gesture, and liturgical dance.

The liturgical actions of the Church, especially those centered around the act of receiving communion, the font of our spiritual life, bind us together in a vision and commitment to the ideals of equity and justice in Christ's preaching of the Kingdom of God. St. Augustine calls the Gospel the "mouth of Christ," and from His "mouth" the assembly hears the stories passed along to guide us toward the ideals of Christian life. The parables combine with the recounting of Jesus' own life to provide the faithful a rich reservoir of lessons on the dynamics and challenges of Christian living. These have become consistent stimuli for the creative products of artists throughout the ages. These works repeatedly call humanity to a consciousness about the goals and vehicles for living a moral life. For the liturgical artist, these goals and vehicles become focused through the liturgy.

The words of newcomer Hans Bos to the world of dance says it best when he writes, "While I dance I can not judge, I can not hate, I can not separate myself from life. I can only be joyful and whole. This is why I dance."<sup>18</sup>

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>[https://youtu.be/R\\_4mrHjbQU5](https://youtu.be/R_4mrHjbQU5)

<sup>2</sup>Kirstein, Lincoln, *Dance: A Short History of Classical Theatrical Dancing*, G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York, 1935, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup>Sorell, Walter, *The Dance Through the Ages*, Grosse & Dunlap, Inc. N.Y, 1967, pp. 30f.

<sup>4</sup>Kirstein, *Op.Cit.*, p. 21.

<sup>5</sup>Sorell, *Op.Cit.*, p.31.

<sup>6</sup>Cf. development of "Ritual as Theatre" in Sorell, *Op.Cit.* pp. 32-33; in Kirstein, *Op.Cit.*, pp. 22-23.

<sup>7</sup>Cf. explication of "Invisible Institution" in Melva Wilson Costen, *African American Christian Worship*, Abingdon Press, Nashville, TN, 1993, pp.36-55.

<sup>8</sup>For fuller discussion cf. Brad R. Braxton, Contributor, "Cultural Connections: The African Roots of the African American Church," in *Worship and Prayer in African American Christianity*, HuffPost, m.huffpost. com 10/25/2011.

<sup>9</sup>Soul-Cleansing Prayer: "Fix Me, Jesus, Fix Me" in Braxton, *Op.Cit.*

<sup>10</sup><https://youtu.be/Ftr6MqgHfHY>

<sup>11</sup>*Jesus Be A Fence*, Words & Music by Sam Cooke, Arrangement © 2012. Vallimar Jansen & Frank Jansen.

<sup>12</sup>Soul-Stirring Worship: "I Feel the Fire Burning," in Braxton, *Op.Cit.*

<sup>13</sup>Johnson, Elizabeth A., *Women, Earth, and Creator Spirit*, 1993 Madeleva Lecture in Spirituality, Paulist Press; Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, 1993, pp. 58-60.

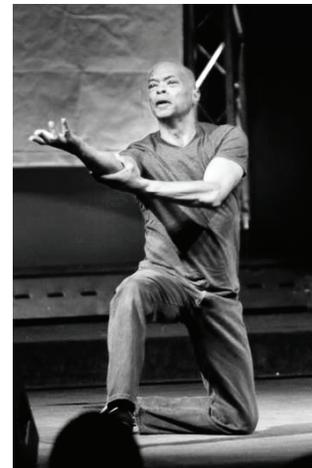
<sup>14</sup>Cf. *Worship, Music & Ministry*, UCCMA Journal, 2019 Winter, pp. 10-14.

<sup>15</sup><https://www.metrolyrics.com/my-world-needs-you-lyrics-kirk-franklin.html>

<sup>16</sup>Cf. *Worship, Music & Ministry*, UCCMA Journal, 2018 Summer, pp. 3-6

<sup>17</sup>[http://www.ucc.org/about-us\\_what-is-the-united-church-of-christ/](http://www.ucc.org/about-us_what-is-the-united-church-of-christ/)

<sup>18</sup>Hans Bos as cited at <http://www.bdancer.com/HansBos.htm>



*John West dancing Cry of the Poor*

**John West** is the founder, artistic director and primary choreographer of the *Valyermo Dancers*, a dance-theatre company whose mission is the preservation and translation of biblical narrative and poetic traditions into contemporary dance. A lecturer and educator at the international and national collegiate and university levels, he facilitates and designs thematic sacred dance workshops throughout the year. John serves on the Sacred Dance Guild Board of Directors and as a member of the North American Academy of Liturgy. Visit John and the Valyermo Dancers at [www.valyermomodancers.org](http://www.valyermomodancers.org)

# Voices of Our City Choir: Music as Social Justice

By Andy Mathews

The mission of the Voices of Our City Choir in San Diego, California is, “to help San Diego’s unsheltered neighbors reconnect with hope and possibility through the healing power of music, individualized and intensive case management and advocacy.” In 2016, Steph Johnson started noticing the number of unsheltered people in San Diego was rising at a rapid rate. She decided that she needed to do something about it. So, she reached out to another musician friend, Nina Deering, and asked her if she would like to start a choir for those experiencing homelessness, and Nina quickly agreed. They started by going out and meeting people where they were. They walked around to people on the street and invited them to come join them for some music. For the very first rehearsal they only had one person show up. They figured that if they could help even one person have a moment of joy in the week, then it was worth it. So, they kept up their efforts.

As Steph and Nina slowly gained the trust of those in the unsheltered community, the choir began to grow. Soon, it was 5 persons, then 10, and now today it’s over 200 people. Steph and Nina learned about the needs and experiences of those living without homes, and they helped to build a community where our unsheltered neighbors could have community and support one another.

Susan Polis Schutz created a documentary entitled “The Homeless Chorus Speaks,” featuring the Voices of Our City Choir, which was shown in Los Angeles and New York and around the country. You can see this documentary by going to [www.voicesofourcity.org](http://www.voicesofourcity.org) and clicking on the “More” tab. You’ll see “The Documentary” on the list, and you can play it from there. This documentary opened even more doors for the choir, and they began to perform much more frequently all over San Diego.

I joined the community by starting as a volunteer, in 2017, who would come and sing along with the group. I was also able to help conduct the choir when Nina needed to be away. Steph had brought together some of the best jazz musicians in San Diego to help lead the music and the choir joined in with

them, creating this incredible energy that just ignited hearts everywhere. We gave concerts out and about in San Diego. We started to bring visibility to the plight of our new friends, and doors started to open very quickly. The choir was literally giving these people a voice, and they began to share their stories with the world.

As I started attending rehearsals regularly, I started to watch the way that the choir members interacted with one another. They had truly become a family. They were welcoming of new people coming in, and they really encouraged one another. You would see someone walk in with their face hidden and as time went on, they would begin to hold their heads up high with a new sense of purpose. This would move me to tears, and I would think about my own life and check in to find more ways to be open and accepting of others. I have truly learned so much from this group of people about the way we interact with others in this world. It was always so beautiful to watch each person blossom and find their inner strength again.

What started as a way for people to come together and make music has turned into something even bigger. Now, the choir has an advocacy team. They have been invited to the table with local and state leaders. They have used their voices to share their experiences and fight for what is right for themselves and those who are undergoing similar experiences. The leaders have been recognized by the city for actually finding a way to help do something to combat this issue of homelessness.

I can tell you that no one expected this to take off as it has. We are so fortunate that it has. At this moment, every single one of the choir members has a safe way to shelter in place. Everyone is in at least temporary housing. Prior to this pandemic, fifty choir members had been placed in housing, we have meals being delivered to those in need of them, we have a food distribution where choir members can come and stock up on groceries, we have people working on their behalf, and we have created a way for other members of our community to be able to give back and help through donations of

their time, resources, money, or presence. The choir has helped people believe in themselves, fight for themselves, and has helped connect them to resources that have bettered their lives. There is a new sense of purpose and belonging, there is hope, and there is a lot of hard work ahead.

The choir has performed with the San Diego Symphony, sang in music videos for groups, been featured in the documentary, been featured on albums, and had chances to sing with incredibly talented musicians of different genres.

We all know that there is great power in music. There is a connection that transcends most other experience that we have with others. This has certainly been true for the Voices of Our City Choir. It has changed the lives of all of those who have been involved with it. I encourage you to look around your neighborhood and see where music is doing good. If you don’t happen to see it, think about starting something. You’ll be amazed at what might happen.

Again, please check out the Voices of Our City Choir at [www.voicesofourcity.org](http://www.voicesofourcity.org).



*Andy Mathews is the Director of Music at Pioneer Ocean View UCC. He is also the Outreach Director for the San Diego Men’s Chorus and the former Co-Artistic Director for the Voices of Our City Choir. He and his fiancé, Travis, live in sunny San Diego and enjoy going on hikes, going to the beach, and taking road trips. They are planning to marry this July in San Diego.*

# Hymn Text: O God, You Call for Justice

by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette

## AURELIA 7.6.7.6 D (“The Church’s One Foundation”)

O God, you call for justice — for goodness, never greed!  
You seek a world of fairness where all have what they need —  
Where all have food and water and homes in which to thrive,  
Where all have hope and laughter and joy to be alive!

O God, you call for kindness instead of keeping score;  
You seek a world that welcomes the hungry and the poor.  
Lord, where there is injustice may we work to protect  
The struggling ones, the voiceless that others would reject.

You call us to walk humbly, for we are not our own;  
We all are poor and needy; we need the grace you’ve shown.  
May we respond to others reflecting what you give —  
Compassion, kindness, justice — so all may gladly live.

O God, may our great nation seek justice, as we should,  
and work with dedication to seek the common good.  
We’re blessed to be a blessing; may we within our law  
Seek justice and compassion that reaches out to all.

Biblical Reference: Micah 6:8

Tune: Samuel Sebastian Wesley, 1864 (“The Church’s One Foundation”)

Alternate tune: ANGEL’S STORY, Arthur Mann, 1888 (“O Jesus, I Have Promised”)

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[www.carolynshymns.com](http://www.carolynshymns.com)

*Ed. – Carolyn has generously agreed to allow us to print her hymns in our journal to benefit our members, but wishes for you to know the following ways of giving her support.*

### Ways to Support Carolyn’s Hymn Writing

I write hymns to encourage people to love God and their neighbors.

I write hymns to encourage people to learn the biblical story of God’s love and to respond to it.

I write hymns because hymn singing leads to joy and justice.

Hymn writing is an important part of my ministry.

I am currently serving five hours each week as a Parish Associate in a wonderful congregation in rural New York State where my

husband Bruce is the pastor; my hymn writing provides a major part of my income and it really does help with our family expenses.

You can support my hymn writing in a variety of ways:

You may choose to donate \$10 - \$40 (or some other amount) per hymn that you use.

You may become a supporter by making a monthly or an annual contribution.

You may contribute by check, made out to “Carolyn W. Gillette”, and send your donation to me at P.O. Box 577, Owego, NY 13827.

You may contribute by donating online at PayPal.

You may contribute by sending me an Amazon gift card.

You may invite me to lead a workshop, conference, seminar, or retreat.

You may suggest a topic for a new hymn.

You may commission a hymn for your church’s anniversary or special celebration.

You may buy my two books, *Songs of Grace: New Hymns for God and Neighbor* by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette (Upper Room Books, 2009) and *Gifts of Love: New Hymns for Today’s Worship* by Carolyn Winfrey Gillette (Geneva Press, 2000).

You may share my hymns web site ([www.carolynshymns.com](http://www.carolynshymns.com)) and books with friends and colleagues, and you may share the hymns related to immigrants or disasters (natural ones like hurricanes or human ones like gun deaths) for which I give permission for free use by everyone.

# Sharing Sacred Space: Transgender Day of Remembrance

By Shirley Keith Knox

*Dana Martin, 31, a trans woman of color, was found shot to death in her vehicle in a roadside ditch about 11 p.m. on Sunday, January 6, 2019 in Montgomery, Alabama. She was shot while driving.*



In November, the congregation of St. Paul's United Church of Christ in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, shares "sacred space" with each trans person murdered during the year. This is the third year our congregation has participated in this "Celebration of Life." I had the honor of sitting next to space created for Dana Martin throughout our Sunday worship service, and I had the honor of reading her name at the Transgender Day of Remembrance Vigil held on the steps of the Pennsylvania State Capitol in Harrisburg, PA.

Transgender Day of Remembrance (TDOR) is an annual observance on November 20 that honors the memory of the transgender people whose lives were lost in acts of anti-transgender violence. Additionally, people and organizations around the country participate in Transgender Awareness Week to help raise visibility for transgender people and address issues the community faces. Transgender Day of Remembrance is a day to memorialize those who have been killed as a result of transphobia, or the hatred or fear of transgender and gender non-conforming people, and acts to bring attention to the continued violence endured by the transgender community.

*Kiki Fantroy, a Black transgender woman was fatally shot in Miami. Fantroy, 21, was found in the early hours of July 31, 2019, after being shot multiple times. She was taken to a nearby hospital, where she died of her injuries.*



St. Paul's UCC became an Open and Affirming Congregation of the United Church of Christ in 2003. A couple of years ago, our ONA Team agreed that further education and understanding was needed about the trans community. We learned of the alarming violence towards the trans community and felt the need to create space in our sanctuary to honor each child of God who was murdered because of transphobia. Congregants sit next to each named space and celebrate the life of the person through worship and prayer. Following the service, worship participants move about the sanctuary to read the names and brief stories about each person. There is no question, this is a somber event. This event draws our congregation's attention to the worldwide epidemic of anti-transgender violence.

How do we make this happen? The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) website is a great resource. During the year, the HRC tracks the names of each person murdered due to transphobia and we obtain the names of each person from this website. We print out the face picture and a brief bio of each person. St. Paul's member, Gene Shaner, crafted the structure using a combination of a dowel rod inserted into a block of styrofoam,

and a hanger attached to the top of each rod. The structure sits upright in a pew with a shirt/blouse and scarf or other accessory placed over the hanger. The face picture of each person and a brief bio is then attached to each structure. As you can see in the picture, these structures are then placed throughout the sanctuary – in the choir loft, next to the pastor’s seat near the altar, and throughout our worship space. On Sunday, congregants arrive and take a seat – surrounding each sacred space for worship and prayer.

During the same week, many congregants attend the Transgender Day of Remembrance Vigil at the State Capitol Building in Harrisburg that serves to inform our state legislature and the greater Central PA community about this alarming crisis in the United States. During this interfaith event held on the Capitol steps, we are often joined by members of the Pennsylvania legislature. We read the names of each murdered person, pray, light a candle, and vow to stand up to hatred!



*Bee Love Slater; a Black transgender woman was brutally murdered in Florida on September 9th, 2019. Slater, 23, was found burned in a vehicle in Clewiston, Florida. She was tied up and shot before she was burned.*

According to the annual transgender violence report published by the Human Rights Campaign, at least 26 trans and gender-nonconforming people were killed in the United States in 2019. Most of those killed in 2019 were young, black women. You can read more about the Transgender Day of Remembrance and find out how you can show support for the community on this day. For more information, visit the Human Rights Campaign/Violence Against the Transgender Community website <https://www.hrc.org/explore/topic/transgender> or contact St. Paul’s United Church of Christ, Mechanicsburg [www.saintpaulsucc-mech.org](http://www.saintpaulsucc-mech.org) or 717-766-7931.



*Shirley Keith Knox is a member of St. Paul’s United Church of Christ, in Mechanicsburg, PA. She is also the Convener of the Open and Affirming (ONA) Ministry Team for the Penn Central Conference.*



# Imaginings at the Crossroads of Worship, Social Justice and the Arts

By Ray Landis

*“God is constantly creating, in us, through us, with us, and to co-create with God is our human calling... Unless we are creators we are not fully alive.”* – Madeleine L’Engle

To co-create with God is at the core of worship. Worship is participatory. It invites people of different ages, races, cultures, and genders to experience the awesome beauty and mystery of God’s presence with us. Worship must both enrich the spirit of those participating and arouse and empower worshipers to live out the Gospel as illuminated by Jesus. As we engage in worship, we learn to reflect and embody the life of Jesus. We strive to experience the world through God’s eyes, recognizing that each person is created in the “image of God.”

At the same time, in worship we are reminded that in order to see the world through God’s eyes, we have to remove the blinders and distorted lenses our culture provides. As we practice doing this, an alternative world view emerges and we yearn to live on the edge where God is. Our worship, at its best, equips us to walk with God through uncertain, and sometimes dangerous, terrain. Together we foster courage in each other to dream and act – to participate with God in creating a world where everyone’s worth is affirmed.

Over the past 30 years serving in music ministry with the United Church of Christ, I have grown deeply invested in the wonderful interconnectedness between worship, music, the arts, and social justice. Exploring these intersecting pathways continues to lead me on a dynamic journey full of vibrant new challenges and discoveries. This is an ever-evolving journey. There is no point where one “arrives” at a fixed destination. My own journey is continually being shaped by new people I meet and artistic expressions I encounter. Below, I share a couple of examples of meaningful Imaginings I have experienced along the way. While I would be happy to share the complete script with anyone who is interested, my desire is offer these Imaginings as examples with the hope they will inspire and spark the reader’s own imagination. I am particularly drawn to musical works that illuminate both the human struggle and divine hope of the Gospel story. I find delight in discovering musical works which seem to suggest possibilities for combining with other artistic expressions. Ultimately, I strive to inter-

weave musical and artistic expressions to bring awareness to injustice and awaken a passion for healing and justice. I found *The Wound In the Water* by Kim André Arnesen to offer such possibilities.

## **The Wound in the Water: Journey toward a Shared Song**

**An original inter-arts program, inspired by Kim André Arnesen’s *The Wound In the Water***

**Presented at First Congregational Church of Webster Groves on April 29, 2018**

I discovered Arnesen’s moving cantata for choir, soprano soloist, strings, and piano while serving as director of music at First Congregational Church of Webster Groves, UCC. In the spring of 2018, the work became the spark for a collaborative endeavor which culminated in an extraordinary inter-arts experience titled, *The Wound In the Water: Journey toward a Shared Song*. Arnesen’s deeply moving music, combined with the prose of poet Euan Tait, evokes a contemporary world in which “we are divided by greed from one another and exiled from our own capacity for love.” In the words of the composer: “This work recognizes the long journey toward healing that we have to undergo and ends with a fragile attempt at a shared song.” The multi-arts concept emerged through creative brainstorming with two brilliant colleagues, Rev. Cliff Aerie and Rev. Jan Barnes. Soon thereafter the creative team grew to include two Eden Seminary students, Erik Falconer and visual artist, Jewell McGhee. As an idea for a dance component took root, Rayshunda Gibson – a lead dancer and choreographer with a West African dance ensemble of East St. Louis – became part of the team. I had served on the board of the Community Performance Ensemble of East St. Louis and had long hoped to design a program that could incorporate the authentic West African drumming and dance so vibrantly exhibited by this ensemble. With creative curiosity and a willingness to think outside the box, this diverse team took on the significant challenge of interweaving luscious choral music, West African drumming and dance, textile art, and monologues

inspired by modern stories of injustice and hope. The result is a multidimensional experience illuminating the brokenness of humanity and offering a pilgrimage toward hope and healing that is possible as we cultivate compassion in our world. While the program does not take place during a traditional worship service, it does occur at the crossroads of worship, the arts, and social justice. As a way to respond to what they experienced, those in attendance were invited to make a donation to Magdeline St. Louis – a residential community for women who have survived lives of prostitution, violence, and addiction.

## **The Narrative**

The diverse artistic elements of the program are connected by an original script, masterfully composed by Rev. Aerie, designed to awaken and inspire the listener’s imagination. Organized in three movements, the script corresponds to the three major sections of the Euan Tait’s poem: “The Cry of the Sea (Our Separation from Creation and Nature),” “Cries of Exile (Our Separation from Each Other),” “The Heart of the Singer (A Fragile Attempt at a Shared Song).” During the program, two narrators guide the audience through the profound, and often ambiguous, texture of Tait’s prose. The narrators reflect and expand on the harrowing images expressed in the libretto and offer monologues inspired by true stories of injustice and hope. “The Akosombo Dam in Ghana” tells the story of a village in Ghana devastated as their once pristine river is now contaminated with pollution (the story was inspired by a journal entry that Rev. Dave Denoon, pastor of the congregation, recorded when he traveled to Ghana to study the roots of racial disparity). “Beatriz in Exile” introduces us to a young immigrant woman who grieves living in exile. “Of Deep and Fragile Peace” shares the experience of a prosperous dentist who travels to a Honduran village to make a difference, only to discover the incredible blessing he receives from those he went to serve. An African drum beat, representing our connectedness to the earth and each other; transports us between reflection and story.

## The Music

The program opens with a plaintive-style chant – Gathered ‘Round, composed specifically for this program. Beginning with a solo voice accompanied by soft African drumming, the music gradually grows in intensity as the choir takes up the melody and the drumming crescendos. Three dancers garbed in colorful traditional African costume process into the isles with great exuberance. In this moment, we become one with the vibrant spirit that connects us all. Yet as the joyous refrain begins to fade, the vibrant rhythm of the dance is interrupted by divisive voices shouting out: Fear, Despair, Anger, Hatred, Exile. The resulting brokenness and discord is a central theme of Arnesen’s *The Wound In the Water*. A large portion of the cantata comprises the middle section of the program. Musically, the work’s dense luscious harmonies, slowly unfolding progressions, and haunting melodies express the deep longing and sorrowful content depicted in the text. Yet throughout the work, the melodic lines strain to ascend and rise above the brokenness of our wounded world – refusing to abandon hope.

The program concludes with Abe Cáceres’ choral anthem, *Called to a Vision: Celtic Ngoma*. While musically very diverse and stylistically different from *The Wound In the Water*, Cáceres’ jubilant score brings together diverse musical influences representing the “shared song” that Arnesen seeks. West African drumming and dance combine with song from the British Isles (SLANE, with new lyrics) and East Africa (“Neno Lake Mungu”). In the closing refrain, the Hebrew word “ruah” is exclaimed by the choir and audience. Defined as both wind and breath, the word evokes the essence of the breath of life and the presence of the Holy Spirit.

## The Visual Expression

As the music and narrative unfold, a visual expression of Euan Tait’s profound text is revealed. The fabric art suspended above the center isle represents water flowing over you. In the middle of this fabric stream, intertwined amidst the blue and green currents, is “the wound in the water,” depicted with earth-colored brown fabric. Early in the program, the three dancers extricate the “wound” from the water. As the program progresses, the fabric wound transforms into the landscape of a homeland; a boat packed with fearful exiles; a distant unfamiliar shore; and at

the end of the journey the fabric wound is torn to create three shawls to envelop each dancer. Ultimately, we are transported from a place of pain to a harbor of blessing. In the end, the program reminds us we have been created to be sisters and brothers, a holy family, caretakers of God’s world. All in attendance receive a torn piece of fabric as a reminder of the “long journey toward healing we have to undergo.”

## The Participants

Choir comprised of amateur and professional singers (18)

Soprano Soloist

String Quintet, Organ, and Piano

West African Drummers (2), Irish Bodhran Drummer

Textile Artists (2)

West African Dancers (3)

Narrators (2)

*Wound in the Water: Journey toward a Shared Song* is an ambitious Imagining to be sure. It is by far the most daring effort I have directed so far. We did encounter some bumps along the way and we did experience valuable learning and growth – most significantly recognizing the need to allow considerably more time for planning a program with this many varied elements. However, the Imagining is a vivid example of what can emerge when a diverse team is willing to take creative risks and think outside the box. It is what can transpire when people are willing to step into the messiness of co-creating; traversing an uncertain terrain where ideas merge and transform and end up very different than how they began. In my experience, it is in this messiness that we discover God creating with us.

While *Wound in the Water: Journey toward a Shared Song* represents an Imagining with a complex structure, some of the most profound and moving Imaginings sprout within very simple and intimate designs. In the spring of 2019, I accepted the call to serve as the director of music ministries at Christ Church Maplewood, UCC. Christ Church Maplewood is a vibrant little church that does big things in the world. As a Sanctuary Congregation, Christ Church is especially committed to seeking justice for migrant and refugee peoples. For nearly three years the church has provided sanctuary for Alex Garcia and advocated for him and his family in their fight against unfair deportation and family

separation policies. Getting to know Alex, who is from Honduras, and his wife Carly, a U.S. citizen originally from Mexico, has been an incredible blessing for the congregation. Furthermore, our call as Christians to recognize Christ among us has taken on a whole new relevance and urgency in this faith community. Christ Church strives to stand with oppressed people and lift up their stories. This happens in worship and in events outside of worship, including direct action.

The Good Friday services shared at Christ Church in 2019 and 2020 offer wonderful examples of the connectedness between worship, music, and social justice. In 2019, the service was organized around the seven last words of Christ. Anne Quigley’s beautiful setting of *The Seven Last Words of Christ* served as the backbone of the service. Following each verse and refrain sung by the choir, a member of the congregation shared a quote of an immigrant who had been in the news during the year. Each of the seven sections closed with the corresponding scripture passage. Lights were diminished as the service progressed, with the service concluding in darkness.

The 2020 Good Friday service was structured similarly. As with most worshiping communities, Christ Church has had to explore new ways of doing worship during this unprecedented time. The service, shared live via Zoom, was organized around six shadows that fell on Jesus: Condemnation, Separation, Sorrow, Despair, Suffering, Death. Each “shadow” was introduced with a scripture passage, followed by a prayer recognizing the shadows of our current time cast by the COVID-19 virus. Each section concluded with a musical reflection shared live by musicians of the congregation from their homes via Zoom. In most services at Christ Church, one will experience musical and artistic expressions drawn from a wide range of styles and perspectives. As Madeleine L’Engle understood, “there is nothing so secular that it cannot be sacred, and that is one of the deepest messages of the Incarnation.” The following music was presented during the service of shadows: “Were You There?” – African American Spiritual (Prelude and Hymn), “Beautiful Scandalous Night” by Bebo Norman and “Six Pence None the Richer” (Condemnation), “Let Justice Roll” by Bobby Gilles and Sojourn Community Church (Separation), “Wide River to Cross” by Jim Lauderdale (Sorrow), Kyrie by Emmy Lou Harris and Phil Madeira

(Despair), “Wayfaring Stranger” – traditional (Suffering), “Pie Jesu” by Andrew Lloyd Webber (Death).

Pastor Rebecca Turner shares the following insights on these Good Friday services:

“When I read the Seven Last Words, or consider the ‘shadows’ in the Good Friday service, I hear a lot of painful emotions. Those same emotions are experienced by people facing oppression and suffering today. Rather than attributing them only to Jesus, I believe we understand Jesus better if we acknowledge where we see them happening today.

“In the 2019 service, we focused on the Seven Last Words. When I read the seven phrases, I remembered very specific quotes of immigrants who had been in the news throughout the year. The feelings of God’s desertion, of nearly dying of thirst, these are real experiences. In them, we see Christ being crucified in our own time and we have to ask whether we will stand beside those being crucified, or turn away and deny them.

“In the 2020 service, we considered ‘shadows’ that fell upon Jesus—shadows like separation, despair, and death. In these we recognized the shadows of COVID-19 sweeping around the world, separating us, filling us with despair, and facing a death toll not previously seen in our own lifetimes. Our prayers were for all of us dealing with the same shadows that Jesus and his disciples had known.

“When we see the suffering of Jesus in those around us, the resurrection has more power to become real in our lives, too.”

Over the next year, Christ Church Maplewood will delve even deeper into the relationship between worship, social justice, and the arts. The church has been awarded a vital worship grant from the Calvin Institute of Christian Worship in Grand Rapids, Michigan. Our project – Christ Among Us: Daring to Decolonize Our Worship – will lead us to new “Imaginings at the Crossroads.” Recognizing that systems and structures designed to perpetuate white privilege have shaped and continue to impact our worship, we will begin to look deeply at all aspects of our worship experiences and expressions. Our year-long project will consist of learning opportunities where members of our congregation will engage with professional faith leaders, artists, and activists who bring a considerable diversity of insight to the process of examin-

ing and transforming worship. Leaders who will engage with the congregation include musician Mark Miller, storyteller Valerie Tutson, and social activist and community artist Elizabeth Vega. Each facilitator or team of facilitators will spend two or three days with our congregation, engaging us in the work of identifying adverse practices in our current worship and guiding us as we begin to re-imagine what our worship can become. Questions that will guide our imagining are:

- 1) How has the colonization of non-white cultures impacted and come to live within our worship?
- 2) What aspects of our worship might we need to change or give up, and what new expressions might be added?
- 3) How can expressions from other cultures be shared in a way that is authentic and honoring – that brings meaning to our worship beyond merely a desire to be “multicultural?”
- 4) How can we create opportunities to engage with other faith communities in order to spur our imagination and think beyond our own experience?
- 5) How might we co-create with voices and expressions vastly different from our own?
- 6) How do we confront our discomfort, as white people devoted to the work of justice, to talk about white privilege and our complicity in benefiting from systems of oppression?
- 7) How can we begin to express in our worship – through story, liturgy, music, and art – our struggle to be a faith community committed to the work of justice and decolonization, in the midst of an awakening realization of how deeply we are harmed and hindered by social systems designed to maintain security for those with power while keeping people of color, women, and members of the LGBTQ community marginalized?
- 8) Can worship itself be an act of justice in the world and what would that look like?

As I look forward to discovering new “Imaginings at the Crossroads,” I wonder what it could look like to co-create with voices vastly different from my own. What might emerge from a creative collaboration where diverse voices imagine together from the project’s conception all the way to its realization? Yes, *The Wound in the Water: Journey toward a Shared Song* celebrated a wonderful interplay between different

cultures and expressions. Yet, the initial concept was brainstormed by three white people (two of them being older white guys). As I think about my connection with people of the African American community in East St. Louis and the budding relationship between Christ Church Maplewood and the local Latinx community, I can’t help but be inspired by the beautiful potential for a fully collaborative worship, justice, and arts expression co-created by people of mixed colors affirming Christ in each other.

I hope what I have shared might spark your imagination. Imaginings at the Crossroads of Worship, Social Justice, and the Arts can take many forms, big and small. When we’re willing to listen to and engage with voices different from our own, wonderful things can happen. Yes, co-creating between people with vastly different experiences and expressions can become messy. It takes courage to step into this uncertain terrain. But when we take that chance, we allow ourselves – as individuals and as a collective body – to be busted open while encountering God in the process.

To see and experience a highlight video for *The Wound in the Water: Journey toward a Shared Song* project, go to: <https://vimeo.com/411588465>



**Dr. Ray Landis** currently lives in St. Louis, MO and serves as the director of music ministries at Christ Church Maplewood, UCC. Over the past 30 years, Ray has served United Church of Christ congregations in Grantville, PA, Cincinnati, OH, Grand Rapids, MI, and St. Louis, MO. Ray completed his undergraduate studies at Messiah College in Grantham, PA, and holds a Doctor of Musical Arts degree in Organ Performance from the University of Cincinnati College-Conservatory of Music. Having experienced time in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, Ray’s approach to music ministry is informed by interaction with different cultures and a strong sense of social justice. He enjoys artistic collaboration with all ages and talent levels and nurturing the creative gifts of all people.

# Loving Our Neighbors

## How my church uses music to care for our community

by Abby Martinage

I've been singing my entire life. As a little girl, I was a member of my church's Choristers, and now, as a high school senior, I'm a member of the Youth Choir. I'm grateful for all that my church choirs have given me, from the opportunity to hone my skills to the chance to be a part of a lovely and supportive community. Beyond all this, however, I'm grateful for my time in the Youth Choir because it has allowed me to use my talents to care for my community in a meaningful way.

Much of the time, this work of caring has come in the form of performances for families in our church. Earlier this year, a trio of girls from my Youth Choir sang at the wedding of a couple who have played major roles in our lives. The groom was one of our youth group leaders, and the bride had been one of the adult chaperones on our summer mission trip to Juana Diaz in Puerto Rico. It was incredibly rewarding to be a part of their celebration of happiness. I've always understood my church's most central value to be that of loving your neighbor, and in performing at this couple's wedding, I was able to love my neighbor by sharing in their joys.

However, caring for your neighbors doesn't just mean sharing in their joys. We must also care for our neighbors in their sorrows, and being a part of Rock Spring's Youth Choir has allowed me to do this. My junior year of high school, a young woman at my church passed away. Her family asked if my trio from the Youth Choir could sing at the memorial service, and the three of us immediately dropped everything to prepare. Music has a way of bringing comfort and connection in the darkest moments, and we wanted to do whatever we could to help a grieving family. Fundraisers and charity concerts aren't the only way to practice the lesson of doing good in the world. Good done on a small scale, supporting one family at a time, can be just as impactful and helps to bring a community together to create even more light.

That being said, I also appreciate the number of wider-scale instances of doing good that I've gotten the chance to participate in through Rock Spring's Youth Choir. My freshman year of high school, my church and I faced a scared world. Regardless of your political leaning, you can't deny that the 2016 election brought with it divisions and conflict at an intensity that scared people, especially those in marginalized groups. In response to this fear, and with the hopes of alleviating it, different groups in the DC-metro area worked together to organize the Concert for Hope, an interfaith performance meant to remind us that the forces connecting us are stronger than any forces attempting to divide us. Two of my friends from Youth Choir sang a beautiful duet about faith and hope, and all of us joined a choir of people from all sorts of religious backgrounds to perform on the steps of the Lincoln Memorial.

In addition to providing comfort and hope, I've been able to genuinely engage with social issues and make an impact in my community as a member of Rock Spring's Youth Choir. My church has worked with Offender Aid and Restoration (OAR) for years, participating in their annual toy drive to provide holiday presents to children with an incarcerated parent and supporting other projects. OAR works to promote racial equity in the legal system and offers many programs to support currently and formerly incarcerated people and their families – values and practices so clearly in alignment with our church's values. Supporting OAR allows us to make good on our promises to be a justice-seeking community, and this support has also come in the form of music. My junior year of high school, my trio from the Youth Choir had the opportunity to perform as part of an OAR fundraising concert. It was so nice to share the stage with the other talented musical groups in our community, and it felt amazing to know that our performance was helping to support an organization that was committed to doing important social justice work in our community.

It's easy to forget who's included when we say that we must love our neighbor. In our passion for caring for those in our direct community, we can forget about the people outside of our circles who also need personal love and support. Likewise, when we expand our focus to care for people far away or people different from ourselves, we can forget the person standing right next to us. When we do justice and love kindness, we must do these things for all people in our local and global communities. Being a member of Rock Spring's choir has allowed me to do that. I've cared for families in my church in times of joy and times of sorrow, and I've supported wider-reaching causes to provide comfort and support for people I may never meet. Everyone in this world needs love and reassurance. Through music, we can provide it.



*Abby Martinage is a 17-year-old senior at Washington-Liberty High School in Arlington, Virginia. She has been a member of Rock Spring UCC for her whole life and has grown up singing with the different choirs in her church, at first as a Chorister, and now as a member of the Youth Choir.*

# God is Still Speaking: A Reflection on Worship, Art and Justice

By Tom Emanuel

**I**t's Winter 2019. I am serving as the pastor of the First Congregational United Church of Christ in Watertown, South Dakota. This small-town congregation is deep in discernment about becoming Open & Affirming of people of all genders and sexualities. Like many communities who go through the ONA process, they're figuring out how to connect their historic faith to a deepening commitment to progressive Christian values.

As a proudly bisexual man with many LGBTQ beloveds, I have a personal stake in every church becoming ONA. I bring this up to my therapist, wondering how I can best support the church in their discernment. "Well, you're a musician," she says. "Why don't you try writing a song for the congregation to sing on Sunday mornings? You're in a unique position as their minister to put words [and music] to their process."

When I get back to the church, I sit down at the ivory-white piano in FCUCC Watertown's sanctuary, taking the church's motto as my jumping-off point: "We resolve to love, agree to disagree, and unite to serve, for GOD IS STILL SPEAKING." By the following Sunday, we're singing a new song called "God Is Still Speaking":

*In the midst of new dimensions  
In the face of the unknown  
In the space between what's yet to be  
And the faith we've always known...*

*God is still speaking in this place!  
Let us serve one another and embrace  
Every child as God's beloved  
Find Christ in every face  
God is still speaking, God is still speaking  
God is still speaking in this place!*

I would never be so big-headed as to suggest that my song played anything but the most minor of roles in FCUCC Watertown's vote to become an ONA congregation in September 2019. Yet music is powerful magic that works on us in secret ways – perhaps the song did make an impact, in its own melodic way. Certainly, it impacted me as the author, drawing me into deeper relationship with my congregation. I suspect,

too, that it impacted the eight-year-old girl who requested it every Sunday: "I love the music," she told me. "It makes me feel like everyone belongs here."

This reflects one of the great gifts that worship has to offer in our efforts for social justice. When we think of justice work, we often think of the public, political side of things: advocating for our undocumented neighbors, showing up to the Pride festival in full rainbow regalia, marching in the streets to demand racial justice. All of this is good and necessary – after all, Church isn't somewhere we *go* on Sunday morning, it's something we *are* every day of the week.

Yet, I'm hesitant to discount Sunday morning outright. A seminary professor of mine, the Rev. Dr. Jay Emerson Johnson, likes to say that we are constantly being *spiritually formed* by the communities of which we are part. Systems of oppression form us to build walls and erect barriers, to construct hierarchies of "good enough" and "not good enough," to act from places of fear and scarcity. Worship on the other hand can be a place of *re-formation* and *counter-formation*. By coming together to seek the presence of One Who includes and transcends all our differences, real and imagined, we catch a glimpse of God's imagination for the world as it *could* be. We remember Who We Are, and Whose We Are, and what we are called to do.

The arts have a key role to play in this work of remembrance and re-formation. Rather than preaching at us about what we *ought* to believe or how we *ought* to behave, art invites us into an encounter of something (or Someone). At its best, worship does the same. Both have the capacity to touch the deepest parts of us, bypassing the "watchful dragons" of our prejudices and preconceptions and inspiring us to become the kind of people God knows we can be. And when that happens, then just maybe justice will roll a like river and righteousness like a mighty stream. (Amos 5:24)

All of which sounds lovely, of course - but how do we do it? Alongside my song "God

Is Still Speaking," I'd like to offer two additional cases from my ministry:

1) In Fall 2016, my playwriting partner Aaron Eaves and I were commissioned to write an original worship drama for the opening of the Encyclical Gallery in Berkeley, California. The gallery was inspired by Pope Francis's Encyclical on Climate Change & Inequality, exploring the intersections between ecology, spirituality, and the arts. When the play "I See Fire" had its first staged reading in the gallery, we invited audience members to move throughout the space during the act breaks and interact with the art on the walls as "icons," windows into deeper reflection on the story and their own role in co-creating a better world.

2) In January 2017, a ragtag band of interfaith spiritual leaders in the San Francisco Bay Area staged a "Requiem for the American Dream" on the night of Donald Trump's inauguration. We processed in full "clergy drag" through the streets of Oakland, California bearing a homemade coffin draped in an American flag and chanting hymns for the dead as we joined thousands of other demonstrators on the streets that night. We then held a public "requiem mass" where participants could name their griefs and fears and come together in song, prayer, and public ritual for solidarity.

All three of the examples I've shared were specific artistic responses to specific needs in specific communities; *your* community may have wildly different needs, not to mention tastes. You're more than welcome to take advantage of the resources at my website [www.PoetPastor.com](http://www.PoetPastor.com), but I'd also encourage you and your communities to get *your* creativity on and make something of your own!

My therapist was right: as ministers, musicians, and creatives, we are in unique positions to put words (and music, and dance, and, and, and!) to a congregation's hopes and fears and deepest dreams. We have a crucial role to play in co-creating communities where *everyone* can belong. Through our creative gifts, we can invite others into

# God Is Still Speaking

Rev. Tom Emanuel

$\text{♩} = 80$

A D E A Bm7 F#m E/G#

God is still speak-ing in this place! let us serve one an-oth-er and em - brace ev-ery

5 A D C#7 F#m E/G# A D E

child as God's be-love-ed find Christ in ev - er-y face. Oh God is stillspeak - ing,

8 A Dm7 A D E A Fine D E

God is still speak ing, God is stillspeak-ing in this place! 1. In the glo - ry of a sun -  
2. In the midst of new di - men -  
3. In the pas - sion of a lov -

12 A G F E D E

- rise; in the stars up in the sky; in the still small voice that  
- sions; in the face of the un - known; in the space be - tween what's  
- er; in the shel - ter of a friend; in the fight for just - ice

16 C#7/E# F#m Bm7 E7 D.C. al Fine

calls to you and beck - ons you to fly !  
yet to be and the faith we've al - ways known !  
roll - ing down and a love that nev - er ends !

a deeper understanding of themselves as the children of a still-speaking God, empowering them to transform their world.

I pray, therefore, that each of you might find that place where, as Frederick Buechner says, “your deep joy and the world’s deep hunger meet.” May you be inspired to work for the Kin-dom of God. And may you find sustenance and strength in the embrace of the Creator



who made you and makes in you still, now and always. ~Blessin’s!

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# Creating Vital and Faithful Worship for the Intergenerational Church

by Jeffrey Clouser

Most churches follow a liturgy (worship acts that the assembly follows in a worship service) based on the Gospel Model. The assembly gathers, receives the word of God, responds to the word of God, most often by communing together, and then goes out into the community to serve God and others. These liturgies and worship resources were transformed into something fresh and exciting in the mid to late sixties as a result of the Second Vatican Council deciding to conduct their masses in the vernacular of the people they served. Protestants followed suit by incorporating the common Christian heritage of worship as found in the third-century era of Bishop Hippolytus. The traditional liturgy of the gathering, word, meal, and sending was respected and cherished. However, as the culture began to change, so did the minds of those who may or may not have experienced the traditional liturgy. The religious terminology, unfamiliar hymns, and irrelevant sermons appeared to make the traditional institutions of faith inhospitable and mystifying. As a result, those seeking something more relevant chose to attend churches with exciting multimedia visuals, upbeat music, contemporary language, and dramatic skits. This “new” church was entertaining.

However, Thomas Long, the author of *Beyond the Worship Wars*, discovered that those who were drawn to the entertainment factor still longed for some of the Christ-centered elements found in the “traditional” church, thus a “third way” to worship was developed by the “vital and faithful churches.” Vital “because they are an active and growing church,” and faithful “because they remain true to the heritage of the church.” According to Long, vital and faithful congregations:

- Experience the mystery
- Show hospitality
- Display the sense of drama in worship
- Embrace and utilize a variety of excellent music in many styles
- Creatively adapt worship spaces
- Connect worship and local mission throughout the service

- Employ worship elements and responses that are ordered and known by heart
- End worship joyfully
- Have strong worship leaders/pastors

This “third way” to worship really speaks to the intergenerational component of many congregations today. Intergenerational congregations have a membership that consists of two or more generations which participate in activities that make them aware of different perspectives. There is an increasing interaction and cooperation among the generations to achieve goals that bring about change in the church. In this paper I will review these nine characteristics which illustrate how church musicians and worship leaders can create vital and faithful worship that ensures success in the current intergenerational context of worship services.

## 1. Vital and faithful congregations experience the mystery.

Thomas Long believes authentic worship meets people’s needs because people need worship. We need to join with others in our worshipful acts of devotion, praise, obedience, thanksgiving and petition. Long states, “Worship is what happens when people become aware that they are in the presence of the living God.” We need to be in a right and loving relationship with God and join ourselves in community with others when communing with God. We come to worship because we want to experience God. Our experiences with God are not something we can control; however, we can create a worship experience that invokes suspense, mystery, and intrigue indicating that something important is going to happen during worship. Leaders should be reverent, the space intimate and simply adorned, and time allotted for silence. Allow the congregation to become aware of the presence of the mystery. In the words of Barry Liesch, “Set aside our preferences and traditions in order to allow God to work freely.”

## 2. Vital and faithful congregations show hospitality.

Humans not only desire to commune with God but we also desire the companionship

of others and long to be in community with others who also hunger for God. Thus, worship not only needs to be God directed but also needs to be people directed. The church should be a place where people are known, welcomed, and loved through the use of name tags, easy to sing hymns and songs, and prayers from the heart. The focus should be on relationships and intimacy before religious commitment and membership. Congregations must welcome the stranger with diverse theological perspectives, think deeply, and accept questions and doubts as essential to faith formation trusting that each person has something of value to contribute to the understanding and practice of the faith. Welcoming the wisdom of the stranger will remind us that we are a faith, active in love, seeking justice and joy, compassion and peace, for all of God’s creation. Christine Pohl states, “A life of hospitality begins in worship, with a recognition of God’s grace and generosity. Hospitality is not first a duty and responsibility; it is first a response of love and gratitude for God’s love and welcome to us.” We can extend this welcome through helpful greeters, clear signage, comfortable spaces with room for conversation, and above all a congregation with a spirit and attitude for welcoming all of God’s people by name. Most importantly, we must recognize and receive the gifts that people bring to our church body and allow them to participate in all aspects of the worship experience.

## 3. Vital and faithful congregations display the sense of drama in worship.

The telling of God’s story, through the use of the Gospel in the Bible, evokes a worship experience that involves word and gesture, movement and narration, with the help of prayers, hymns, and recitations. Worship is a play. The worshipers are the actors and God is the audience. Everyone in the congregation participates as they strive for excellence, not perfection, in worship. The order of the service provides the narrative that shapes the worship and gives it meaning, thus it must be logically constructed to ensure proper flow and pacing. The possibilities to enliven each scene of the service, gathering, word, meal, and sending, are endless. So every congregation should

ask themselves how each scene can be more visible, clear in its meaning, and invite participation. Keep in mind, worship is an active lifestyle involving a task to do and a service to render. For this reason, worship must be rehearsed and practiced. The end result is a worship service that is offered and performed for the church body. To perform is to serve and minister by carrying out an action or function. Thus, worship is a performance that involves the skillful action of the gifted church body that takes into account the wisdom of the Holy Spirit.

#### **4. Vital and faithful congregations embrace and utilize a variety of excellent music in many styles.**

In our diverse communities we see how our diverse musical interests conjure up a variety of emotions for all of us. For many, those emotions run deep and are tied to memories and experiences that only they can feel and remember. That is why musical decisions in a church need to be made thoughtfully and respectfully for all who worship there. It is often the music that carries the theological message that worshipers can recall when outside the four walls of their worship space. This theological message conveyed through music should reach across the generations that are gathered together in worship, and this is achieved by engaging the congregation in the use of excellent music that allows them to “express the thoughts and feelings of their worship.” The variety of music styles incorporated during worship engages the assembly, thus enhancing these thoughts and feelings. It is safe to say that not everyone likes every style of music, but we must be willing to -- and might I add be committed to -- singing the music that we don't like for the sake of remaining a unified church family.

Constance Cherry explains how church musicians “need to consider the quality of theology, words, and music when choosing songs for worship.” This means we must discern what is most appropriate in the context of our worship setting when choosing the hymns and songs we sing and ensure that they glorify God in spirit and in truth. Careful attention must be given to the songs we sing so that they are beneficial to the spiritual formation of the congregation. In *Worship Seeking Understanding: Windows into Christian Practice*, John D. Witvliet states, “Pastoral musicians have the important and terrifying priestly task of placing words of sung prayer on people's lips.... [They] have the holy task of being stewards of God's Word.” God has entrusted

musical leaders to make sure the music of worship is of God and from God.

Barry Liesch points out that these songs and hymns need to be singable, participatory, and impart musical shape and variety by using different vocal and instrumental techniques that vary the musical expression. He also notes how acoustics and amplification make all the difference in congregational singing and a good worship experience, so be sure to “seek for your sound booth a person who knows the sound board technically and has a musical ear.”

Music transforms lives and it is important for church musicians and leaders to remember that each congregation is different and must find its own voice when making music together. Always reflect on the music's ability to shepherd God's abiding presence into worship and let the songs provide opportunity for prayer and meditation.

#### **5. Vital and faithful congregations creatively adapt worship spaces.**

Vital and faithful congregations have created and adapted their spaces to allow for gathering and movement that accommodates the congregation, choir, altar, baptismal font, and pulpit in a more intimate way. According to Long, “Vital congregations have made their ‘houses of worship’ more humble. They have opened the doors on the gathering space and made the congregational space more hospitable.” In so doing, they brought “God closer to the assembly through color, art, and movement” which instills an excitement in the assembly that stirs “praise, devotion, surrender, and service.” Long points out that “Christians want the arrangement of worship space to communicate not only that worship happens here but also what kind of worship takes place.” Furthermore, he says, “A worship space is a physical expression of what the worshipers here believe about the nature of God and the character of faith.” Lastly, Long explains “A church should not say ‘Look at this building; this is the church,’ but instead, ‘Come inside this building to be the church; enter this place to act as the church.” In just the short four years that I have been serving my congregation I have seen the worship space transform and become more hospitable. Pews have been removed, a welcome center has been established, technology updated and new signage created. And what they lack in a conducive space for intimate worship they sure make up for by the welcome they express to strangers every week.

6. Vital and faithful congregations connect worship and local mission throughout the service.

Vital congregations have a clear congregational mission and a vibrant energy for action and service that impacts worship. Service and worship complement each other and can be seen and heard as a result of what is being done in worship. Songs build community, connect us to the global church, tell the stories of God's faithfulness in challenging times and enhance the words we use in worship. Music also provides comfort, brings us hope, and guides us in service to our community. Our songs should support and affirm the mission of the church and how the church lives out its faith in the community. As a result, the congregation's enthusiasm for mission will span the number of activities they participate in throughout their community and beyond which gives them their identity. People want to come to church to join with others in offering themselves and their service to God. Be mindful of the fact that congregations are usually part of a larger denominational framework. Do not allow the beliefs, policy, polity, and mission of the denomination to cloud your judgment of a particular congregation and its mission. Many congregations within a particular denomination do not necessarily conform or adhere to all the policies of their denomination and instead choose to follow their God-given conscience. Carefully consider what each congregation is doing in their community to determine if it is a safe and inclusive space for worship open to the work of God and the Holy Spirit in and among their diverse neighborhoods. Hymn composer David Haas confirms, “We are called to act with justice, we are called to love tenderly; we are called to serve one another; to walk humbly with God.”

#### **7. Vital and faithful congregations employ worship elements and responses that are ordered and known by heart.**

Worship done by heart is effective because there is a “stable order of service that is meaningful and suspenseful and is in the memory bank of congregational responses.” Worshipers gravitate toward repetitive patterns that remain fairly constant over time and that are also filled with action and drama which moves toward resolution. These events in worship contain actions and words which the congregation has committed to memory allowing them to focus their attention on the Gospel and on God. A congregation that knows the motions, knows the words, and knows the

songs by heart is free to devoutly worship the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit alongside the others gathered there. However, keep in mind that on any given Sunday you may have visitors in the assembly who are not familiar with your repetitive order of service. Remember to be hospitable every Sunday by offering direction and guidance as you progress through worship. Treat every Sunday as if it is a new experience for everyone that is assembled there. To help with this, churches may want to consider using screens or monitors to project parts of the worship service. Responsive readings and prayers as well as song texts and music can be projected, which frees up the assembly to engage as one body without having to page through worship guides and hymnals.

### 8. Vital and faithful congregations end worship joyfully.

As stated before, most churches follow a worship structure in which the assembly gathers, receives the word of God, shares a meal, and then is dismissed to serve God and others. This pattern of worship has movement that gets us from here to there. Symbolically, we are in the kingdom of God at the great banquet table sharing a feast with the saints and heavenly hosts and then blessed and sent out to love and serve the Lord. Moving towards a place of joy and thanksgiving in worship involves a mix of soft and somber music selections along with joyful and upbeat pieces. The pastor ends the sermon with a glad affirmation of the Gospel, and the worshipers are invited to partake in the meal by coming forward to the communion table. There is a time to celebrate and rejoice through music, singing, and dance because the good news has been made known. Long explains, “By moving along the pilgrim way in worship, the congregation will arrive at the place where they can glimpse their destination, and nothing can hold back the celebration.”

### 9. Vital and faithful congregations have strong worship leaders/pastors.

According to Long, the Christian church gathers around the presence of God in Christ, not around a pastor or other human being. The role of the clergy in a Christian community is to serve and enable the congregation to exercise its discipleship. The church belongs to Christ, and the Holy Spirit empowers all of its members to be ministers. However, the skills and the gifts of pastoral leadership do matter. What the leadership of the church does or doesn't

do has a direct correlation to the quality of congregational life, the spirit of worship, and the appeal of the church to visitors.

By virtue of ordination, clergy have the authority to bless others, are willing to lead and serve, and create hospitable worship that allows for the sharing of gifts. No matter their credentials, skillful and gifted church leaders establish and maintain positive relationships with those they serve. They are kind and show a genuine interest in the lives of those in the assembly. They lovingly encourage the best from their congregations and invite them to put their gifts and skills into service. They share the leadership of worship with others and are aware of God's presence during worship which shows in the way they act and speak with the assembly. They handle the elements, objects, and symbols of worship with a loving and calm reverence as they speak warmly with spirit and invite the congregation to worship.

When exploring the possibility of revitalizing worship in your intergenerational church setting, Thomas Long suggests you keep the following in mind:

- Worship renewal requires strong leadership from the pastor who must take charge in directing the change and implementing the vision.
- Change will cause conflict. Be prepared for the complaints as you graciously lead the church to a new and significant place in worship without arrogance.
- Involve the key leaders of the congregation as you seek input and guidance about your vision for change. Educate the leaders on your vision and allow them to help plan and implement the changes in worship with the help of the congregation. Remember, people like to join with others in offering themselves and their service to God.
- Publicly educate the congregation about the vision and changes in worship through articles in the newsletter, morning announcements, letters, emails, Sunday school curriculum or in the context of worship during a sermon. Vital and faithful worship is designed to set your congregation up for success.

No deed in worship is unimportant, so remember to affirm the skills and gifts of the assembly as you enable your congregation to worship more faithfully. As we create vital and faithful worship in the current context of intergenerational worship

services, let us aspire to live and love like Jesus as we work towards a world restored by grace and peace.

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*Jeffrey Clouser, a member of UCCMA, currently serves as part-time Director of Music Ministries at Palmyra Church of the Brethren in Palmyra, PA, where he facilitates the choral (Chancel Choir, Men's and Women's Ensembles), handbell, and praise team programs, participates in the planning of the worship services, and organizes special musical events for the church. He has a certificate in church music from Virginia Wesleyan University, a BS degree in Education from Millersville University, and is in his second year in the Masters of Church Music degree program at Trinity Lutheran Seminary at Capital University in Columbus, Ohio.*

# Creative Vespers

## Part 3: Jazz

By Michele Hecht

This is the final installment of a workshop, titled “Creative Vespers – Campfire, Taizé and Jazz,” that I presented at UCC General Synod (June 2019). In the previous two issues, I shared information about Campfire Vespers and Taizé. This issue focuses on vespers in the jazz style.

For the past twenty years at my church, I have had the privilege of working side-by-side with my dear colleague Jeff Haeger, who is a fellow alumnus of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, a choral educator and jazz pianist who studied with Ellis Marsalis. We have a shared background in choral experience, repertoire and pedagogy, but he has a wealth of knowledge and experience in the world of jazz that is still fairly foreign to me. The information shared in this article is from our collaboration and is shared with Jeff’s permission and blessing.

### Intention

For many years, Jeff has been shaping our Sunday morning traditional worship into a more blended worship style with his gospel treatment of hymns, our eclectic choices of choral music and short worship songs, but most effectively with his piano improvisation underneath the prayers. We often hear from our congregants that this is their favorite part of worship. There is something special about the way the music breathes with the prayer, following and flowing through the words, echoing and affirming the intention, bringing the listener to a place of deep reflection. This is a very common practice in the black church, but less so outside of that tradition.

The intention for our Jazz Vespers was to expand those few moments of prayerful reflection into a full hour of evening meditation that would allow the listener to sink a little deeper into that experience. We also wanted to be true to the art form of jazz, so that even jazz aficionados in attendance would recognize the elements and structures at play. We wanted to create a conversation between word and sound that would engage the listener in a way that felt unexpected and spontaneous. We also wanted to balance listening with

participation, to welcome people into our circle of creation.

### Planning

I spent a bit of time researching examples of jazz vespers online and found several helpful resources, videos and printed programs. I found an informational/promotional video from First Presbyterian Church of Medford, Oregon that provides an excellent explanation of the invitational aspect of jazz and how their jazz vespers have added a new level of outreach in their community. Some churches and other institutions, such as Duke University, provide insightful information on their website to describe their jazz vespers services. I shared this background information with our clergy and with Jeff and scheduled a planning meeting.

Jeff brought his musical ideas to the table, and those selections became the foundation of our vespers. Jeff suggested the song “Peace” by Horace Silver as well as “Love Supreme” by John Coltrane. From there, we developed the idea of a three-part theme of “Hope, Peace and Love,” selecting poems and other readings that supported those themes. We then included one of our familiar short prayer songs “Don’t Be Afraid” by John Bell, and ended the service with the congregation joining in singing “When the Saints Go Marching In.” The music provided the continuous thread, underpinning and echoing the spoken word and creating an emotional arc to the service. Once the order of worship was in place, we hired a jazz vocalist and other musicians (saxophone, string bass, drums) and scheduled a rehearsal that included the clergy.

We advertised the event in local news outlets, including the local jazz radio station housed at the community college just a couple miles down the street. About 100 people, mostly church members, but also some visitors and friends, attended and shared their appreciation for the event. The ambiance was part concert and part worship, with the audience applauding after solos, as is part of the tradition of jazz performance, but also with heads bowed in prayer and eyes gazing dreamily toward the heavens. It is precisely this blurring of lines

that makes jazz vespers such a welcoming experience to both regular churchgoers and those who are simply seeking a deeper connection through music.

We plan to host another jazz vespers next year. With Jeff as a part-time church musician with a full-time music teaching job, creating a weekly or monthly series is not sustainable. We also would need to dramatically increase our budget to accommodate hiring jazz musicians more regularly, in addition to our more traditional choral and instrumental programs. However, the thirst for this kind of music and this kind of worship is strong, so we will continue to offer jazz on Sunday mornings and use it as a way of connecting and welcoming people.

### Sample Order of Worship Jazz Vespers, October 2018 First Congregational Church of Glen Ellyn, Illinois

(This program was printed and available to those in attendance to take home after the service, but not intended to be followed during the service.)

We invite you into space of meditation, prayer, and introspection. Tonight, there will be no program or bulletin, only a list of the songs being shared; for while there is a structure to the service, we want to leave room for the improvisation that lies at the heart of jazz. Tonight, we embark on a musical journey of hope, peace, and love, reflected in the sounds and the words that we’ll hear.

Listen carefully; if not to the music you hear, then to the music within, the beat of your own heart, stirred to life.

### Musical Selections & Readings

Prelude:  
“Dear Lord”  
John Coltrane (1926-1967)

Anthem: “A Love Supreme”  
John Coltrane (1926-1967)

### Hope

Anthem & Reading: “Amazing Grace”  
John Newton (1725-1807)

“I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings”  
Maya Angelou (1928-2014)

Musical Prayer: “Don’t be Afraid”  
John Bell (b. 1949)

### Peace

Reading: “Nirvana”  
Charles Bukowski (1920-1994)

Anthem: “Peace”  
Horace Silver (1928-2014)

### Love

Anthem & Reading:  
“I Choose Love”  
Mark A. Miller

“The Prophet”  
Kahlil Gibran (1883-1931)

Postlude:  
“When the Saints Go Marching In”  
Traditional

### Resources

Aerie, Cliff and The Oikos Ensemble. [http://www.oikos-ensemble.com/Who\\_We\\_Are.html](http://www.oikos-ensemble.com/Who_We_Are.html)

Duke University Chapel Jazz Vespers - <https://chapel.duke.edu/christian-worship/worship-services/jazz-vespers>

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**Michele Hecht** is in her 19th year as Director of Music Ministry at First Congregational Church of Glen Ellyn, Illinois, where she leads a staff of four musicians and oversees a program that includes two adult choirs, three children’s choirs, handbell choir, Taizé Ensemble, Recorder Ensemble, song leaders and instrumentalists. Michele studied at the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music, earned her M.M. from Roosevelt University, B.S. in Music at the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign), studied conducting at the Kodály Institute in Hungary, and has two levels of Orff-Schulwerk certification. With her church choir, she has performed and conducted at Carnegie Hall (2003 and 2008, respectively), the Kennedy Center in DC (2007), Fourth Presbyterian Church in Chicago (2014 and 2016), an international choral festival in Charleston, SC (2011), St. Louis Cathedral in New Orleans (2017), and Grace Cathedral in San Francisco (March 2019). Michele is currently serving as president of the United Church of Christ Musicians Association (UCCMA); she also chaired the national UCCMA conference at Elmhurst College in Elmhurst, Illinois (2015). Michele served as Repertoire and Resources Chair for Music in Worship (2016-18) for the Illinois chapter of ACDA (American Choral Directors Association).



**Jeff Haeger** is in his 18th year as Associate for Music Ministry at First Congregational Church, Glen Ellyn, IL. Jeff co-directs the adult choir, leads the Junior High Singers, and plays piano during worship. He lived in New Orleans from August 1996 to December 1998; while there, he studied jazz piano with Ellis Marsalis and played at various venues in the city. In addition to his duties at FCCGE, Jeff is the chorus director at Hill Middle School in Naperville, Illinois. Jeff holds a bachelor’s degree in Music Education from the University of Illinois (Urbana-Champaign.) Along with his co-director, Michele Hecht, he has performed with and conducted their church choir at several famous venues, including Carnegie Hall (2003, 2008).

# These are a Few of Our Favorite . . . Testimonials for Being in Choir

Compiled by Eric Dundore

**T**he joy, the passion, the commitment! From where does this come? What circumstances make our choir members join and then remain in our church choirs? We asked some of our singers from across the country to testify to their stories. We certainly thank them for their time, talent and dedication, but also for being willing to share their unique perspectives on why they keep singing with us.

## Tom Manak

### First Congregational Church of Glen Ellyn, IL

Forty-seven years ago, Ro and I met in the Marquette University Varsity Chorus. We'd like to say we've been singing ever since but we took a hiatus until we joined FCCGE. In fact, it wasn't until Michele Hecht became choir director that we talked about joining the choir. It didn't take long to join and become just another choir member.

Singing in our choir is like singing with your own family – choir is our family. Everyone helps when there is a need and you can always count on them. Choir becomes a normal place for Ro. She is just a member of the choir, not someone in a wheelchair with Parkinson's disease and all that goes with it. The choir members, especially the altos, and leadership do this for her. For me it is the music, the singing -- not the words but the notes, the harmonies, the crescendos, the decrescendos, trying to give to Michele and Jeff all that they want and need for the congregation. It is my escape.

Michele asked me to write this only a couple days after all church activities were suspended due to the coronavirus pandemic. Although we always enjoy the summer break from choir rehearsals, this is different. We miss it, our friends, and the music. We were preparing for our cantata and we will miss that – but maybe not the German words.

Choir helps us keep our heads up and Michele helps us keep our pitch up. Thank you, Michele.

## Chris Bowers-Paris

### St. Paul's UCC, Mechanicsburg, PA

Music and singing have always been a source of connection, comfort, and inspiration for me. From the time I was very young and my parents took turns singing me to sleep at night, or soothing me when I was scared, to my first memories of joining the junior choir in the second grade, singing has always been a part of my life. I sang in the choir in the church where I grew up in Baltimore for eighteen years. Some of my happiest memories are of choir rehearsals and the feeling of accomplishment in singing a difficult a cappella anthem or learning how to sing in Latin and German. I still remember singing Benjamin Britten carols and the Gregorian chant, *Hodie Christus Natus Est*. One of the earliest values my mother taught me was that singing is a way to connect with God, and that being a part of a choir is like being a part of a family, a gift we're given and an opportunity to worship and minister to others.

I came to St. Paul's UCC in Mechanicsburg after losing a child to cancer. With my heart broken and feeling a sense of loss and distance from God and from people, I was longing for connection, and comfort, and inspiration. My most powerful experience of healing and belonging has come from being a part of the Chancel Choir at St. Paul's. I was warmly welcomed and have found a home there for the past thirteen years (and by the way, Altos Rock!) Singing in the choir has restored my relationship with God and with a church family. We have shared joys and tears, as well as our annual end-of-the-year stromboli party to celebrate the completion of each successful season.

One of the most profound experiences of the presence of God and of using worship to minister to others was on the last Sunday (3/15) when we were able to gather as a congregation because of the health pandemic. Although not scheduled to sing, our director gathered us together and asked the choir to sing a spontaneous and never-before rehearsed anthem, *You Are Not Alone*. We

stood in the chancel, without our robes, and sang with all our hearts a song of comfort and solidarity during one of the most difficult times our community has ever experienced, to let people know that no matter where you are, or how difficult life can be, you are truly never alone.

## Nancy Shimamoto

### Pioneer Ocean View UCC, San Diego, CA

I am a proud member of Pioneer Ocean View UCC, a small church overlooking beautiful Mission Bay in San Diego. With fewer than 80-90 regular attendees, most of us are involved in one facet or another of Sunday morning worship, and sometimes we wear three or four hats in one day. As moderator, it was my job to represent our congregation in meetings with our pastor, boards and committees. Along with that, I volunteer as communion server, lead one of our eight hospitality groups that serve lunch every week, support our safety team, usher and greet, and attend to many last second emergencies that always come up on Sunday mornings. After a year and a half of this, I was becoming tired, burned out and, quite frankly, upset that I never had a quiet moment to worship God on Sunday mornings.

And then, our music director, Andy Mathews, invited me to join our choir. I've always loved singing, but never thought I could be good or brave enough to stand in front of my peers and sing. I argued with Andy that I could never perform in front of my friends and family. His response? "Nancy, when you sing in the choir, you're not performing for the congregation, you are worshipping God!" Hmmm, what a beautiful way to think of it.

So, I joined my choir friends and began practicing how to worship on Sunday mornings. I hardly recall walking up to sing the first anthem hymn last September. I was nervous, afraid of hitting a sour note, scared of making a mistake. But I DO remember the hymn -- "Why We Sing," by Greg Gilpin. It's the story I'm trying to tell here, except

put more eloquently to music. We sing to collectively make the world a better place -- to love friends, mend hearts, tear down walls, share joy! Each week got easier, as I studied voice, listened to the words, and gained confidence. I found I could focus on the music we share, and temporarily forget about the other duties on my plate.

It's been six months since I began worshiping with the choir and I have come to love Sunday mornings. I find peace, solace, joy and thanksgiving for those precious moments I can share my voice with my congregation AND worship God. It is a blessing God saved up for me, that Andy was wise enough to reveal just at the right time! I am now past moderator, but still do a lot on Sunday mornings. A few weeks ago, I wore five hats before, during and after service, easily slipping from one task to another. But I did it with joy in my heart and a smile on my face as I worshiped God! And my favorite hat of all? Humble choir member, of course.

I realize I'm literally preaching to the choir here, but I want to thank you for sharing your musical gift with your congregations, just as Andy did with me. Please continue to do the good work of Jesus through song! It has impact far beyond what you can imagine.

## Warren Lawson

### Trinity UCC, Chicago, IL

My name is Warren Lawson and I have been a member of the Men's Chorus at Trinity United Church of Christ for seven (7) years. I joined the choir after being a member of Trinity since 1984. A long-time choir member approached me after church one Sunday and asked, "Why haven't you joined the Men's Chorus," to which I had no answer. So, the next Tuesday, the choir's normal rehearsal day, I came out and became a member. During the time I have been a member, I have learned several things that keep me coming back.

First, it is not just about the singing -- it's about the fellowship. When we have prayer before rehearsal, it sets the stage for that session. We celebrate our successes and work on our weaknesses. We laugh together, discuss current events and discuss how we will respond to events around us.

Second, the choir is like an extended family. I feel it deeply when we lose a member, or a member loses a loved one, or when someone is struggling at home or with a job or has health concerns. I also celebrate when one of our members gets a new job, or has a new grandchild, or we welcome a new member, or a member has overcome some issue that had been holding him back.

Third, the choir is like an entity where everyone has a role to play. From directors, to officers, to members, we all have a part to play and when one individual is missing, we feel it. We missed their presence, their mannerisms, their sayings, their voice.

Fourth, I am always amazed at the power of a group of men praising God through song. When we sing at Trinity we are always well received. However, when we sing at other churches, the power of our presence shines through.

Fifth, when you are a member of the Men's Chorus, you are not just a member when you are at Trinity -- you are recognized any and everywhere. I recall once, on the way to church, I was dressed in African attire and had on my lanyard that had scripture written on one side and our ministry on the other. I stopped to get an orange juice at the store and a young man who worked there stopped me and asked me to pray for him. As I took his hand to begin our prayer, a young lady who was shopping asked if she could join. That's what happens since I joined the Men's Chorus.

Finally, the music. I have always believed that our music doesn't have to be perfect to touch someone in need. Yes, we sing traditional songs, anthems and spirituals, but it's when we sing gospel songs and songs written by our directors that we really shine. These are things I have experienced and these are the reasons I am a proud member of the Trinity UCC Men's Chorus.

*Ed. – We are looking for contributors to "Our Favorite Things" column in the Fall 2020 issue. The topic is music for All Saint's Day. Send your favorite composition to me at [ericdundore@outlook.com](mailto:ericdundore@outlook.com). Include the title, composer/arranger, the performing entity (SATB, handbells, organ, etc.), publisher's information and a brief statement about the piece. The deadline is July 20, 2020.*