

When Words Fail, Music Speaks

Music has always been an important part of who I am. From the children's orchestra in elementary school in Staunton to the choir and band in high school to majoring in music performance in college and grad school. While I enjoyed participating in music at school, it had an even greater influence on my faith development. Each Sunday I watched my parents and aunts and uncles and grandparents singing in the choir at Second Presbyterian in Staunton.

Therefore, when moving into other communities, I always sought out congregations where I could be a part of a church's music program. Singing the great hymns of the faith still speak deeply to me. Therefore, coming to Massanutten Church seemed a natural move at the time.

Music has always played a significant part in the worship at Massanutten. When other congregations were struggling to maintain their music programs, Massanutten decided to invest in developing a stronger music ministry. We created a vision where anyone could use their musical gifts in service to the church.

The music ministry – also called the Massanutten Musicmakers - grew with musical opportunities available for all ages. Singing experiences were available for children and youth choirs ages 5 through 18 years. Three handbell choirs welcomed ringers at all levels. These groups joined an active adult choir to participate in worship leadership. At one point we estimated that over one-third of the church's members participated in a musical group of the church.

It inspired me to see leaders step forward to lead a musical group. As Director of Music, one of my tasks was to resource and support all the groups and their leaders. We encouraged them to attend conferences and events to develop their skills. At all times, the leaders and groups were *reminded they were participating in leading worship and not performing in worship*.

There have been many inspiring moments in worship at Massanutten. Here are 2 brief stories I want to highlight.



I had a dream to present a very popular rock musical (pulpit drama) – CELEBRATE LIFE - which would engage youth and adults together. It was the story of the ministry of Jesus from birth to death. Although I had doubts we could put it together, through many prayers and the encouragement of the pastoral staff, we decided to go ahead. The musical involved about 60 people – youth and adults - from the congregation who rehearsed, sang, acted and worked in the background to bring this exciting and moving presentation to a full sanctuary. It became one of the most memorable events we did while I was director.

Another especially moving experience was during a Youth Sunday. The theme was WATER and how it was integral to our daily lives. A large mural was painted depicting a waterfall that descended from the top of the chancel area, flowed across the floor and emptied into the baptismal font at the center of the sanctuary. As the presentation came to a close before the last song was sung, each youth stepped to the baptismal font and shared the date of their baptism. That experience was very moving for all the youth as well as the congregation.



Through the years, this congregation has generously supported music endeavors here. We shared our sanctuary and organ with Massanetta's Church Music conference for organ classes. We also shared our handbells for handbell classes at Massanetta.

The Massanutten Brass Band was begun in this sanctuary in 2001 and played periodically for our worship. This brass band continues its service to the community and has become an award-winning musical organization. Handbell music of multiple groups has reverberated off these walls many times.

This sanctuary has hosted concerts, recitals, community gatherings, and hymn festivals. Thanks to the generosity of our congregation and the visioning of the building committee who created this beautiful sanctuary, we have ideal acoustics for all kinds of musical presentations here.

Each week, Bob and Carol lead our excellent adult choir as they inspire us with anthems which enrich our worship. I'll bet most of you don't know the story behind how we got the pipe organ which Carol now plays. It came out of a church that was closing. Our youth choir and handbells played in that church on one of their tours just before they closed. So when they were ready to close we were given the opportunity to purchase it and move it here. This congregation made the significant investment in this beautiful instrument so that it now leads us in singing our faith every week.

~ Doug Sensabaugh