

December 8, 2016

Musicians of Nativity,

Greetings from the church office! I hope many of you are finding this year's journey through Advent to be a meaningful one; I know I am.

Before going any further, I want to say a word of thanks to all those who were able to join me for a meeting last Wednesday. Hearing your thoughts and hopes was an important step as we all move forward together in this mission of making Christ known through music in worship. Thank you.

One major takeaway from our time together was that some communication about the plan for the future would be helpful. I think our way forward was outlined in the meeting. Since not everyone was able to attend our meeting, however, I'm going to include the major points here, which should get us all on the same page.

First, I want to lift up one particular emphasis, because it's going to drive everything moving forward: the song of the congregation (vocal and instrumental) will continue to be Nativity's top priority. This means that as we move forward, congregational *song* (the music of the people) will be used to complement and enhance our *liturgy* (the work of the people) in as many ways as the Holy Spirit directs.

Nativity is made up of many talented people who have a wide variety of gifts. It will be the goal of the worship ministry of this congregation to get as many people involved as possible, utilizing as many of their gifts as we can.

The way we will accomplish this is to evaluate music in worship by how it enhances the participation of everyone in the congregation. Instrumental accompaniment and choral anthems are most effective when they draw people into worship, inspiring and leading them to participate. The music in worship will be aimed at the "First Choir," a term describing the entire congregation as the core ensemble. You will probably hear me talk about this more in the days to come, lifting up the "First Choir" as the thing that drives our efforts.

Next, I want to address the future of musical ensembles here at Nativity. Currently, our interim musician, Gary Mitchell, has agreed to direct one ensemble through the remainder of 2016. This gives Gary the time he needs to get to know our congregation and our gifts. The first ensemble will be a choir that will meet on Wednesday evenings in Advent, preparing music for worship on Christmas Eve – all are invited to join this group. In 2017, a new ensemble will begin meeting on Wednesday evenings, one which will work towards providing anthems on a weekly basis at our 10:30 worship services. The first rehearsal will be Jan. 4<sup>th</sup> at 7:00 pm. This ensemble will be versatile, and it will intentionally represent a cross-section of our congregation: youth and adults will be invited to sing together, providing music of various styles.

Beginning in 2017, we are planning on the expansion of Gary's direction of ensembles. Each time new groups are added, we will actually add two at a time. Gary travels a long way to be here, so these ensembles will have back-to-back rehearsal times. The next two ensembles Gary will likely work with will be the Young Youth (children under middle school) and Youth groups. After this, the next wave of two new ensembles can be determined.

Additionally, even though some things are changing, some also remain the same. The Campfire Choir will continue under the direction of Pastor Tim Canniff-Kuhn in 2017. There will also be handbell opportunities continuing in 2017, and these will be led by Amber Wollner during the transition. All are welcome to explore participation in either or both of these ensembles. Additional ensembles are always welcome, and I invite anyone who is interested in starting (or restarting) a group to contact me.

Along those lines, I am asking that anyone interested in participating musically in our worship ensembles to sign up on a sheet in the Fellowship Hall (go to the Welcome Desk and look for a sheet with music notes on it). This sign-up is out in the open so that it is clear that anyone is welcome to volunteer in some way. I'll check it each Sunday, and contact those listed to see how they feel led to participate. I cannot underscore this point enough: *this is a way for everyone to get involved, and to share whatever gift God has given*. This sign-up will also be the place to start if you want to sing a solo, or accompany a hymn, or dance in the liturgy, or even explore starting a music ensemble of your own. After I know you're interested, we'll talk together about finding a way to let your light shine.

Finally, I know there may be some curiosity about filling our vacant parish musician position. While initially it made sense to start the search immediately, wisdom from this fall's Nativity Forums has shown me otherwise. A search committee will be formed and we will do the holy work of listening for the Spirit and meeting candidates – taking time to consider our options faithfully. While we do that work, we are blessed to have a gifted musician who is willing to see us through this time of transition, helping to make sure the song of Nativity continues throughout the process. If we are willing to engage in this together, we will discover an enriched and vibrant faith in this community along the way.

Thank you all for your faithful support of Nativity's music programs and your commitment to Making Christ Known in song. If there are any questions, please feel free to give me a call or send an email. I pray your Advent journey remains a powerful reminder of the expectant hope we all share in Christ.

Yours in Christ,

Pastor Gregg