

Music Department Report

2019 Report of the Music Department

The Lord has blessed our worship as choir and congregation throughout the past year in no little part because of the sensitive and expert leadership on the part of our accompanists, Mrs. Melissa McMillan and Mrs. Elsie Dye. No congregation can sing well with poor accompaniment and we have so long enjoyed singing to excellent and thoughtful accompaniment that I fear we often take it for granted. Thank you, ladies, for your excellent work on behalf of both the congregation and the choir. Fine musicianship enables the choir to sing anthems new and old, simple and difficult from all eras of sacred music. This in turn connects our worship to that of the catholic church, both triumphant and militant. We have always thought it important to add music that takes us beyond the boundaries of our own Presbyterian and reformed tradition. Choral singing in the congregation's worship also makes possible an elevation of thought and feeling beyond that produced by the congregation's own voice. That being so, we have reason to be very grateful, as a church, for the body of fine singers willing to invest the time and effort both to prepare and to perform. I'm also happy to note that the adult choir has this past year been enlarged by a number of young people. This is an important development as a substantial portion of the choir's veterans are growing older. We can have, on certain occasions, as many as forty singers, quite evenly divided among the four voices, though it is rare for there to be nearly as many singing at either of the two morning services.

Through the years of its Lord's Day work our choir has developed a substantial repertoire of sacred anthems. This is a great advantage since, more often than not, the choir sings twice in a Lord's Day service and sometimes three times, very unusual for church choirs nowadays. To sing so much each Lord's Day requires substantial and familiar repertoire as there is insufficient time at rehearsal to learn and perfect more than a few new anthems at once. We are constantly adding to the repertoire but the congregation should know that learning new pieces takes substantially more rehearsal time. As in previous years the choir in 2019 introduced anthems new to the congregation but also sang anthems familiar and much loved. The mixture of old and new, as in everything else in our Lord's Day worship, is a testament to both to our place in the long line of generations of Christian worshippers and to our place in the present generation of believing life.

It has also been a tradition at Faith to perform more substantial works of the classical sacred repertoire. This is done both for the edification of the congregation and the training of our young people who are unlikely to be introduced to this grand music in any other place than in church. On the evening of Palm Sunday the choir presented Gabriel Fauré's *Requiem*, one of the most magnificent of the modern church's oratorios. The choir's presentation was wonderfully enhanced by a simultaneous presentation of sacred art selected by Tamara Woodard and displayed through the technical expertise of her husband Dale. One happy recollection of that sacred performance is that such a beautiful expression of a Christian's confidence in the hour of death was our beloved Andrew Allen's last experience in the Lord's house.

The congregation's choral worship is completed by the work of our Choristers, ably rehearsed and directed by Mrs. Melissa McMillan. In the autumn of 2018 Mrs. McMillan and I decided to separate our body of Choristers with a view to more age-specific teaching. Admittedly, there was a bit of "divide and conquer" in our thinking as well! The younger group, aged 5-9, was able to pull off one performance in an evening service in the spring of 2019, singing *Children of the Heavenly Father*. What a delight it was

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for me to work with these children, so willing and so full of personality (we read lots of poetry together which we all enjoyed very much). The older group, led by Mrs. McMillan, sang several times in worship, notably on Pentecost Sunday when they were assisted by the adult choir on *O Sinfuni Mungu*. Come September it was obvious that I was not going to be able to manage rehearsals on my own so Mrs. McMillan wisely lowered the age of the older group to 8 and boldly plunged into preparing three anthems, a Latin canon, a solo and a descant which were performed in our 4:00 p.m. Christmas Eve service. We hope to begin again in February with two groups of choristers divided by age.

In mid-October we were treated to a piano recital by Dr. Ryan Smith, professor of music at New St. Andrews in Moscow, Idaho. Dr. Smith became known to us through the Kvaes, whose sons have studied at New St. Andrews. His Friday evening recital was a treat and many of our own piano students benefitted from the master class Dr. Smith gave on Saturday morning. Events such as these increase appreciation of technical expertise, of musical genre, and the beauty of a well-played piano.

One thing we have always hoped to do is increase the number of instruments accompanying the congregation. We appreciate several string players who regularly assist us and some others who do so occasionally. We have long wanted more percussion and this year have added both a set of timpani and congas. So far we have made only a beginning of using them for worship, not least because we do not yet have a trained percussionist in the congregation. We hope soon to fill that need.

For your information, the line in the budget for Music is devoted to 1) the purchase of new sheet music for the choir (nowadays we require 50 copies of every piece of music we purchase) and the Choristers; 2) the purchase of music for our instrumentalists as well as lessons for our organist; 3) the purchase of equipment (in 2019 e.g. the purchase of drums); 4) lessons for potential percussionists; 5) the tuning and maintenance of our four grand pianos and two uprights, and that of the organ; and 6) some clerical assistance (keeping track of the music of a volunteer choir singing at least twice a week requires a great deal of attention).

We are now operating without a Director of Music, someone in overall charge of musical worship in the congregation. But meantime the three of us enjoy working together and divide the load as best we can. The congregation may address questions or concerns to any of us. Whatever issues are raised, we will talk them over and respond as soon as possible.

Respectfully Submitted,
Florence Rayburn, Choir Director