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St. John the Evangelist thankful for new church

(<http://www.post-trib.com/news/neighbors/1631017,07nstjconcert0625.article>)

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"It is in the midst of this assembly that our music ministers find their true purpose in worshipping our great and wondrous God. ... In our music and in our lives of faithful discipleship, may we always give witness -- 'Ad majorem Dei gloriam' -- to the great glory of God!"

So reads the mission statement of the St. John the Evangelist Catholic Church music ministry, which recently performed in concert to celebrate the first anniversary of the new church in St. John.

Singers and instrumentalists filled the worship space with a blend of contemporary and traditional sacred music during the two-hour program before a crowd of more than 300. Natalie DeJarlais, choir director for the 170-year-old parish, said the 21 selections were geared to a wide audience.

"Some of the music members like the traditional more, and some like the contemporary," DeJarlais said. "We tried to pick pieces that everyone would enjoy."

Ron Foltman, leader of the praise band, saw the blending of music as a chance for the 55 members of the ministry to use their gifts. Foltman, a guitarist, wrote "A River of Hope," one of the concert selections. The program gave all the musicians the chance to showcase their varied talents.

"When all the parts of the ministry come together, we put music on each other's lips, making the ministry strong and, by doing so, we all remember why we're here," said Tina O'Drobinak, director of music and liturgy.

The church was built with music in mind, DeJarlais said. The organ, a three-manual Rodgers, was custom designed for the worship space. Five ranks of Ruffati pipes also were custom made in Padua, Italy, along with the organ's casework. O'Drobinak said the organ could accommodate up to 37 ranks of pipes.

"The three-quarter round design of the church provides both sound and visual impressions," O'Drobinak said. "The people can see each other, versus a more traditional up-and-down-type seating."

Because of the configuration, acoustic support and high-domed ceilings, the church creates a near-perfect environment for music.

Worshippers can hear themselves, which, in turn, encourages greater participation from the entire assembly, DeJarlais said.

Love of church music drew Lynda Bodie to the concert. A member of the music program at Ss. Peter and Paul in Merrillville and of the Gary Diocesan Choir, Bodie has a special love for music as prayer.

"Music gives emphasis to the words," Bodie said. "Sung music is very profound for me."

Gary Scott traveled from the north side of Chicago to bring his mother, Victoria, of Crete, Ill., to the concert.

"We pass by the church going to and from doctor's appointments and it's just magnificent," Scott said. "When we heard about the concert, I knew we just had to come. The music is outstanding."

For these St. John musicians, music is not a performance, but a humble way to bring people closer to God.

"We want music to provide a connection to God," Foltman said. "We're doing his work, and that gives us a much higher purpose for being here every week."

Added O'Drobinak: "Every member of this ministry is talented in his or her own right. But when it all comes together, it's pretty darn close to heaven."

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