



# The New England Church Pulpit

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THE POWER OF MUSIC

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Psalm 92.1-4

*It is good to give thanks to the Lord, to sing praises to God's name; to declare your steadfast love in the morning, and your faithfulness by night, to the music of the lute and the harp, to the melody of the lyre. For you, Creator, have made me glad by your work; at the words of your hands I sing for joy.*

Psalm 98.4-9

*O sing to the Lord a new song, for God has done marvelous things. Make a joyful noise to God, all the earth; break forth into joyous song and sing praises. Sing praises to God with the lyre, with the lyre and the sound of melody. With trumpets and the sound of the horn make a joyful noise before the Creator of the universe. Let the sea roar, and all that fills it; the world and those who live in it. Let the floods clap their hands; let the hills sing together for joy at the presence of God.*

It was the summer of 1989 that we realized the need for a staff person to develop a music program for our children's choir. The first person I thought of was, of course, Ina Heup. I had known Ina for several years and knew her expertise with children. She had just left a church music position and wasn't quite sure that she wanted to get back into the church game, which I understood; few jobs are "part time" in church work. Churches are notorious for wanting full-time work for part-time pay. It was mid-year budget-wise and we had no money to do this but after talking it over at Cabinet, we decided we needed to do it, believing that Ina's outstanding reputation as a children's choir director would be a good "draw." And the rest, as they say, is history.

Ina has demonstrated through her leadership that there is power in music. There is power to excite, there is power to soothe; there is power to undergird the lonely spirit; there is power to create community. We have learned as we've watched shy children shine singing with the chorus or a solo in a play; we've watched children with special needs be nurtured by the sense of family that she facilitated through the power of music. And many a time we have all wanted to clap our hands or have dried the tear that music has evoked in the anthems of a Sunday morning.

Eight years ago, the organizers of a half-marathon in London extolled the power of music as a powerful performance-enhancing stimulant for its 7,000 runners. London's "Run to the Beat" race was predicated on the research and consultation of a sports psychologist Costas Karageorghis who had devised musical soundtracks that are just as powerful as illegal chemical substances that athletes commonly take to excel. He commented that "music is a great way to regulate mood both before and

during physical activity. A lot of athletes use music as a legal drug” They can use it as a stimulant or as a sedative.”

The link between music and performance is just one example of the inroads scientists and doctors are making into understanding the amazing power that music has over our minds and bodies. Science is backing up our intuition and experience that music really does reduce pain and stress, improve our brains and basically change how we experience life.

(Robin Lloyd, LiveScience Senior Editor, posted 15 October, 2008 online)

The church has known this for centuries. We value the power of music to console us when we're down and express our elation when our spirits soar. Hymns and anthems, bell choirs and children singing, the sonorous chords of the organ when all the stops are pulled out and the melodious notes of the piano combine in diverse ways to excite and calm our minds at the same time.

Music has power to rally the team to victory when we sing the school fight song. It is music that people turn to on a sinking ship to keep passengers from panicking. Music is a powerful tool for memory. One of the surest ways of helping a child learn the alphabet or a nursery rhyme is to sing it. And I dare say that most of us would have to sing at least part of the National Anthem if someone asked us to recite the text.

Music is the universal language. A person from Russia reads the same music as the musician from Chile. While there may be characteristics that define Mexican music or Polish music, the notes and the rhythms that are on the page are the same throughout the world. And though musical tastes change from generation to generation, and the music of Lawrence Welk waltzes its way through one generation while the music of the Beatles excites another and Prince yet another, music has found its way into each generation for good or ill to touch the mind, soul, heart and voice throughout the ages in every culture.

Music is universal across species as well, for scientists have found that the ability to keep track of rhythm is fundamental to the behavior and cognitive processing of all living organisms. Among zebrafish, for example, a neural 'metronome' is perceived to be the reason these fish remember rhythm over relatively long time periods. When the beat stops, the fish apparently 'remember' the rhythm and will continue to swish their tails in time to it. The research suggests that our ability and tendency to keep time with music is something we inherited from our earliest evolutionary ancestors.

Sadly, however, we are often too busy to hear and appreciate the music, whether it be the chirping of a bird, the wind in the trees, or a child humming a tune long before they can speak.

In a Washington, D.C. Metro Station on a cold January morning in 2007, a man played on his violin for about 45 minutes. During that time approximately two thousand people went through the station, most of them on their way to work. After three minutes, a middle-aged man noticed there was a musician playing. He slowed his pace and stopped for a few seconds before hurrying on to meet his schedule. Four minutes later, the violinist received his first dollar: a woman threw the money in the hat and, without stopping, continued on her way.

Six minutes after the violinist started playing, a young man leaned against the wall to listen to him, then looked at his watch and left. A few minutes later a three-year-old boy stopped but his mother tugged him along hurriedly. The kid stopped to look at the violinist again but the mother pushed hard and the child continued to walk, turning his head all the time to see the musician. This action was repeated by several other children, and each time, every parent, without exception, forced their children to move on quickly.

Within those forty-five minutes the violinist played continuously, without stopping, and in that time only six people out of the two thousand actually stopped to listen for a short while. About twenty gave money but continued to walk at their normal pace, and in the end the man collected about \$32. When he finished playing, the silence took over. No one noticed. No one applauded, nor was there any recognition.

What they didn't know, or apparently care about, is that the violinist was the famous Joshua Bell, one of the greatest musicians in the world. He played one of the most intricate pieces ever written for the violin on an instrument that was worth \$3.5 million. The staging of this incognito performance was organized by the Washington Post as part of a social experiment about perception and people's priorities. The experiment succeeded in showing us how we fail to hear the music in the first place, and if we hear, are so busy we don't take time to give it its due power.

How might we hear more appreciatively, for our soul's and the world's soul's sake, the music of the universe? How might we open up our ears and our hearts to appreciate the music of a child singing the Alphabet Song to herself or see the manner in which a teenager enjoys the rock music that causes his body to move so nimbly? How might we feel the rhythms of the universe in the seasons without complaining of how cold it is or how hot it is or how inconvenient the rain; or appreciate the daily cycles of the sun and moon in their chaotically harmonious orbits? How might we know God more fully in the music that is all around us but which we all too often miss because we're late or we have places to go and people to see?

I am grateful beyond words for the music ministry of Ina Heup, sharing the power and the joy of music that has helped us tune our ears to the varied forms in which music creates life. Week after week as we've come into this sanctuary, we have been reminded again to appreciate the power of music to make life meaningful and connect us to the One who is at the center of its rhythms and melodies, making myriad possibilities of the dissonance and harmonies that keep us balanced and healthy. Let us pause each day to give thanks for music and for its power in our lives. Amen.

--Gary L. McCann

## PASTORAL PRAYER

God of truth and beauty, music of the spheres and source of all things good in humanity and nature, we come to this sanctuary today to focus our minds on things of everlasting value. As we gather to sing hymns of praise, raising many voices as one, we are reminded again of the beauty of the created order, from the simple to the complex, from the seen to the unseen, from the known to the mysterious.

For the achievements of the human mind and character, for the truth that science seeks, the beauty that art creates, the goodness that comes from caring, and the rhythm of life in its daily course we are encouraged. For social victories where light has overcome darkness, where love has proved stronger than hate and where that which seemed impossible has become possible, we give thanks.

Today we give particular thanks for the music of this church. This congregation has been nurtured and inspired by the music through the ages, and in gratitude, we have sought to offer up the very best that music has to offer. We are grateful especially for the musical leadership of Ina Heup who has so selflessly and diligently served as catalyst to evoke from within us the music that is deep within the soul. We thank you as well for the dedication of our Chancel Choir and Bell Choirs, and for the children who so beautifully preached to us last Sunday through their lovely voices and smiling faces.

Be present with us today that we may be transformed by the renewing of our spirits and in so doing may bring the song of peace and joy, of hope and love to the world in which we live. In the spirit of that which inspires music, Amen.