

You mean it's not about me?

Interest session Arkansas ACDA Summer 2016

In today's ever changing world, one thing stays the same in the traditional church, need for excellent music in worship. No matter where one is, what size church one is in, commitment level, money surplus or lack of, this will never change. It is a constant challenge for musicians who are directors or leaders in the church and for that matter, everywhere!

I do not pretend to know more than anyone else. I do want to share the things that have worked for me in my career with the UMC that might give you some hope, inspiration or tears considering the way you interpret.

When I began in my first church at 19 years old, I knew nothing. I was in college and learning everything I could through study and osmosis. Of course, at that time, I thought I had everything I needed to do this church thing. How hard can it be? Well... here is what I learned through my incredible mistakes and wonderful luck.

Recruitment:

Things that made a difference or were learned:

Be excited NO MATTER WHAT!

No one in this day and age under the age of 50 will give their time just because they feel it is their duty. If they do, you truly have someone who loves music in spite of leadership. Most programs are inspired by leadership. How one dresses, ones attitude, energy level makes a huge impression upon your group dynamic. It is important to give our best no matter if volunteer, part time or full time musician.

Volunteers are PRICELESS no matter what the level of musician they are.

I used to hear about all the large church programs and think, wow they have it easy. Look at all the people, and what they do. They have so many, they can do anything. Truly some of that is true, but most is truly because of leadership and pool of recruitment.

If one is in a small church, your pool of recruitment is not in your pews, it is your community. We as musicians have to be social, people driven. Why should someone trust you to be in your ensemble if you don't speak to or even acknowledge them in many ways?

1. If I go to a restaurant, a movie, anything community oriented, I am recruiting. I ask people about who they are, what they do, where do they go to church. If they tell me they do not, or not a regular attendee, I go in! If they are at concerts or arts events, they have the arts in their blood! I am always subtle, find out about them and find ways to invite to the church for a function. I try a social event first. Worship is great, but people usually are put off by that invite.
2. The ministry you have are your best recruiters! If they believe you are leading them in ministry, they will share with others. They will go and tell everyone. Every rehearsal I have, before I pray at the end, I ask, "Who have you asked to join the music ministry?" Yes of course I always get snarky remarks. Truly almost every week I get someone sharing with me publicly or privately who they have asked. They love it! Make it a goal. What do you have to lose? People will never do anything they are not inspired to do, so inspire!
3. If your group is not what you want them to be, too small, not very strong as a whole, take them to hear groups or ministries that are. They will never leave you for them. They will appreciate you for exposing them to things they never dreamed possible. Fellowship through music is the best evangelism tool! Use it... It's free!

4. I also offer free voice lessons for all choir members. It makes them feel wanted and seems to cut down on nerves. It also makes them feel important and builds a personal relationship. I love it because I can hear and fix habits and get the sound and vowels I like!

Find a common Vision:

If your group is smaller and could stand a few more men for example, find a vision that includes men. Mission is the best way to recruit young people. They want to get their hands dirty! They may never let you know they can sing or play an instrument, but you will find out if you work side by side in mission. Have a pancake supper to raise money for homeless shelter or a Variety show to raise funds for the needs of your community. Ask who would help serve in a soup kitchen or help repair a home or anything with your group. The options are endless! IT WORKS! I have raised thousands of dollars by these methods and picked up singers or ringers every time. I PROMISE!

The “C” word...

The scariest word in the English dictionary today is “Commitment.” I see the fear in every person in one way or another. It is our job to overcome it. To overcome it truly is to

redefine it. Who says the “C” word has to mean what everyone or the dictionary says it should? It can mean whatever the Director wants! “YOU ARE THE DECIDER!” (A quote from my friend, Dustin Cates) It is ok if a person can only come once a month. It is ok that they give you 12 ways they cannot commit; just get them in a rehearsal! They will come around. Trust me! They will also love you for letting them enter on their terms. Meet them where they are...They will share with others.

Social Media

I think Facebook and Twitter is of the devil. I wish I never had to see it or use it. If the Donald or Hillary can use it, you can too! That being said, it is truly the best way to recruit people into your ministry. If you do something for the good of God and community, share it! Don't rely on anyone else, you do it! How else will people know you love them and are excited about what you are doing that makes a difference? I try to post after every rehearsal I have. I talk about the energy and spirit that came out through the time together. I always get comments and views. I post Anthems, with all ages, funny stories, what our needs are, you name it... POST! It is free and the world is your audience. Make a video of your ministry being silly. Share it as much as possible. People want to have fun! You can be serious and fun at the same time... it is possible!

So now you have them in your group... what do you do to keep them?

Retention:

This is where the “It’s not about me” part of the title comes in.

I hear so many of my friends and colleagues say, “I would never do that, I came from the University of blah, blah, or my teacher would roll over in their grave etc... Friends I say this with deep love and grace, this must stop! It is not about us. It is about Christ. It is about what we do to make a difference in others lives through music. That is our ministry. It is truly that simple.

No matter what size of ensemble you have from 8-150 it is the same. If you love and care for your people and show it, they will do anything for ministry. People want to be inspired. It is not our job to show off by doing the hardest Oratorio or Anthems or major works. It is our job to inspire, and create opportunities for people to serve by using their gifts. We have to strive not to push people into situations where they cannot succeed. Inspire them to go above and beyond by loving and teaching them. If we simply put something too hard or nowhere near what they like to do in their hands and expect results... disappointment every time.

I have found success in getting them to do wonderful things by blending. Not a “Blended” service but blending styles within a program. This works for smaller churches especially. I do it always because major works are great but there are parts that simply don’t inspire and box people in if they don’t like the composer.

I like building my own program with separate octavos. It is so much more welcoming. Everyone usually gets 4 or 5 out of 6 they like. That is a major accomplishment! I mix all styles... for example:

Advent

Sanctus –Durafle (from Requiem)

Mary Did You Know? - Arr. Courtney with solo (Cheese Deluxe!)

The Three Kings – Wilan

While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night-Courtney

O Holy Night – Adam

Gloria – Randol Bass

Mixed with Handbells for carols, carols and more big carols!

Mix the program for all people of all ages. Something for everyone. People want DRAMA for Advent.

Holy Week and Easter

So many options, but always heavy and serious can be done in many ways. For Example, use titles like U2's MLK or I Can See the Light of a Clear Blue Morning. Nothing says Good Friday like Dolly Parton!

Pentecost

(I love Pentecost because you can get away with anything! No traditions, no rules! Holy Spirit Come!)

Use all the traditional readings and songs. Add in something like an arrangement of Katy Perry's Firework for Bells, Hogan's I'm Gonna Sing til the Spirit Moves in My Heart. Do something over the top no matter how easy or hard. I love using Craig Hella-Johnson music for Pentecost.

Never EVER be predictable. How boring. Open your mind each season to new genres of music and how it can inspire.

For Comfort

There is usually a video or recording of every Anthem you will do. Send your video's out to them on email. Send good recordings, and bad ones. They can be examples of what you preach from someone else. If your choir does not have email, make CD's. If they feel prepared or not, this rests on them. They have the confidence you did everything possible to get them there. Perception is everything!!!!!!!

Bring a visiting conductor in from time to time. Who cares how your group sounds! They will show up and be motivated to please. Nine out of ten times they will say exactly what you have. Another perspective and energy always brings results!

I could go on and on. Keep your folks jumpin'. Never fall into a rut of pattern. It truly kills programs. My dear friend Kevin McBeth says, "A busy choir is a happy choir." It is so very true. You should plan them into mayhem. Keep something on the schedule as much as possible. Make sure it is both in and out of the church.

Worship Services

Concerts

Travel Opportunities

Mission Work

Gather the Ministry at least twice a year. A kickoff and a celebration of service at end of year.

Variety show or Talent show

The list can go on and on. It is up to you on how strong you want your ministry to be. Time is the key.

I will end with my favorite saying. When I hear, “Kyle we can’t do all this,” or “We will never be able to do this piece.” I always respond by sharing that no one said this Jesus thing was easy!

Grace and Peace to you!

Kyle Linson

Director of Music and Worship Arts

FUMC Little Rock Arkansas