

The Sound of Praise

Written by Jim Cato

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The Sunday evening service at the Parish Church of St. Helena is casual, contemporary, and growing every week.



A powerful, joyful sound pours out of the 296-year-old building on Church Street during Sunday evening worship service. The words aren't new, but the tempo is. Sunday's more casual contemporary service at the Parish Church of St. Helena (Episcopal) drew a record number of young and older worshipers on Nov. 16. The Worship Team, guided by Michael McIntyre, leads worship at the 6 pm service each Sunday. On this particular Sunday, the worship prelude included "You'll Come," "Dwell," and "God Is Good." "God of Wonders," "Breathe," and "Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)" comprised the three-song praise set.

Last month, McIntyre joined St. Helena's as contemporary music worship leader. He previously was youth minister and led the contemporary music program at St. James Episcopal Church in Charleston. Christians have praised God with music and songs for centuries, and McIntyre follows in the footsteps of Neil Tisdale, who led the Sunday evening worship team for several years.

Fran Sanders, a warden of St. Helena's Vestry, defines the 6 p.m. service by capitalizing WORSHIP. "It was truly PRAISE music," she said. Her husband Gray called the music "inspirational."

Pat Gould, St. Helena's director of music, recently pointed out that McIntyre will "teach each team member (and members of the congregation) how to get more from their worship experience and how to express their love of God through music."

McIntyre was raised in a Presbyterian Church in Fort Washington, Pa., near Philadelphia. After returning to the church and accepting Christ, he worked in the frozen food industry for 18 years. He returned to college and pursued a degree in Biblical counseling, and "the Lord changed my path toward youth ministry." He spent 12 years as youth minister at St. James with the bonus of serving as music director. He believes that "worship can be reverent, but it can be fun."

McIntyre describes the Sunday evening music as a "pop sound, rich in theology." The music is a marked change from the traditional Episcopal songs at the morning service, but "everything that happens at that service flows from the relationship with the Lord," McIntyre said in a recent interview. "My job is to worship the Lord with my whole body, mind, and spirit." He wants the church sanctuary to feel like a holy living room, and "I am stepping up there with a congregation that I want to share my life with: 'Thank you, God, for everything you have given us.'" McIntyre points out that there "is no age limit; it's for everyone." And there is pizza and fellowship in the Parish Hall after the Eucharistic service led by one of St. Helena's clergy.

St. Helena's, located in downtown Beaufort at 505 Church Street, warmly invites all to "come ride the wave and drink from the river of life" on Sundays at 6 pm.