

I am continually amazed at how specialized our culture has become; you know, there are doctors who specialize in just feet and attorneys who specialize in only worker's comp. Some would probably even find it fascinating that I specialize in *church* music. Sometimes I think this specialization narrows our views.

I am always intrigued when I get the reply, "Oh you don't want me in your choir...I can't sing" when I invite someone to sing in the choir. The first surprise is that the choir is *our* choir not mine. The choir, along with congregational singing, is our *community* voice of praise. The choir belongs to its members, in extension to the congregation, and in another extension to God.

The other surprise in the oft-heard statement of decline to join the choir relates to specialization. Our culture has become so accustomed to paying for tickets to hear professionally performed and frequently electronically processed music that the concept of volunteer gifts freely shared to praise God in song is foreign to many people. This is the reason that many churches have had no choice but to move to a praise band model because it requires less volunteer help.

The final surprise in the response above is the completely ignored concept of music *ministry*. The music that the choir shares in worship each week is the fruit of a ministry that is grounded in care for one another, prayer, fellowship, mutual work on a shared goal, and yes, even a little laughter at ourselves.

So my invitation is not to join a musical ensemble, even though that is a part of it. My concern is not your talent or skill level, because both of those can be developed. My invitation is to join a *family*, a family where each member is loved and accepted, and every gift is appreciated and nourished. The question is not "can you sing?" but "do you have a song in your heart to share?"

If the answer to that question is yes, we have a place in choir for you and plenty of supportive reinforcements to guide you in developing your gifts and sharing your song. The privilege of service and developing gifts is also important for children to learn, and that is what we seek to teach in children's and youth choirs.

I would like to close with sharing the prayer the adult choir says every Wednesday and Sunday: "Bless, oh Lord, us thy servants who minister in thy temple. Grant that what we sing with our lips we may believe in our hearts, and what we believe in our hearts we may show forth in our lives, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen." This is a prayer for all of us to embrace.