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Noteworthy: Gray celebrating 25 years as Immaculate Church's music director

By Don Wilkins Messenger-Inquirer

Oct 3, 2020

Matt Gray is celebrating his 25th anniversary as director of music at Immaculate Catholic Church.

Photo by Alan Warren, Messenger-Inquirer | awarren@messenger-inquirer.com

Matt Gray was meant to play music.

And for the past 25 years, he has done just that as the music director for the Parish of the Immaculate on Christie Place.

“It just kind of happened,” said Gray, who is celebrating his anniversary at Immaculate this month. “I wasn’t pursuing a life or career as a church musician at the time.”

Gray started playing the piano at about the age of 7.

By the time he was 12 years old, he was playing piano voluntarily for Mass regularly at Ss. Joseph and Paul Catholic Church.

“That was my home parish and that was the way I served the church,” Gray said. “By the time I was 15, the pastor of the church offered to start paying me to keep me there. So it became a part-time job for me.”

For Gray, he didn’t realize that playing for Ss. Joseph and Paul would be a training ground for being a church music director.

During his college days at Western Kentucky University, Gray said he would even return home every weekend to play the Saturday and Sunday Masses.

Gray said his focus at WKU was broadcasting.

“I wanted to work in television or the film industry,” Gray said. “My minor was in music because I knew music was going to be part of my life in some way.”

To pursue the broadcasting career path, Gray figured he would not be returning to Owensboro.

About six months before graduating from college, Gray said he even quit playing church music.

“I was thinking I was going to move to Nashville and start on my career there,” Gray said.

Those plans, however, changed once he and his wife found out they were going to have their first child.

Gray’s priorities then shifted to his family and the decision was made to remain in Owensboro.

And that choice was helped by the Rev. Richard Powers, the then-pastor of Immaculate, who called Gray about becoming the church’s music director in 1995.

To fulfill his dream of writing and producing music, he also started his own business called Gray Sky Music.

During his tenure at Immaculate, Gray has worked under four different pastors — Powers, Tim Sweeney, Tony Jones and John Vaughan — who have allowed him the flexibility to operate his music production venture.

“I couldn’t live on either one by themselves,” said Gray about his music director job and his business. “They work well together. All of the pastors and staff that I’ve worked for here at Immaculate have allowed me to balance both schedules.”

Along with playing and selecting each week's song selections, Gray oversees the church's adult, youth and children's choirs as well as the contemporary ensemble group. In all, he coordinates with about 50 people in the music ministry.

Gray said the challenge has always been balancing the ministry he's been called to and the job itself.

"You're always in charge of helping everybody else with their spiritual life by helping them pray or ministering to them through music," Gray said.

And because the main Masses take place every Saturday and Sunday, Gray said that means weekend time and trips with the family are rare.

"While most of the world holds normal office hours and the weekends are theirs ... we've always had to alter that to make it during the week," Gray said.

Despite those hurdles, Gray said the church staff has always been there for him, his wife and three sons.

"They've not only taken me but my family under their wing," Gray said. "They've been there through life's challenges to support me, whether it be a death in the family, somebody Wbeing sick or somebody having surgery. It's celebrating with us or being sorrowful with us when we're being sorrowful. And I know there are a lot of jobs that don't have that."

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