



Musical Minute

A compilation of Musical Minutes
shared during the year 2020

McAllister Memorial
Presbyterian Church

900 N. Alleghany
Avenue
Covington, VA 24426

Over the last six months, McAllister's members and friends of the church have given generously to the Organ Restoration Fund. The following letter and original poem of dedication were enclosed with one donation received shortly after Christmas. The thoughtful insight and sentiment expressed by this grown-up "child" of the church was a beautiful gift that I thought should be shared. With her kind, if shyly granted, permission, we reprint the following from Rebecca Linkenhoker Gudgeon.

Beth,

The enclosed donation is to be used for the Organ Restoration Project. When I heard that the church was going to undertake this, I knew I wanted to contribute. I thought for a long time about whether or not I should give the donation in memory or honor of someone; however, the list was too long. How could you ever choose one out of the many, many people who have been meaningful to the music program at McAllister. And then it came to me, the reason this is so important and such an important legacy is: The Music:

The Music that binds the church together.

The Music that, more than any minister, moves the Holy Spirit
through all that it touches.

The Music that drifts out of the windows and brings joy to the entire
community.

The Music that taught the story of Jesus' birth to the children through
the eyes of the "Friendly Beasts."

The Music that reaches inside the heart of a frazzled mother on
Christmas Eve and reminds her that the presents and food will
be fine because they aren't the meaning of Christmas.

The Music that created many, many adults who still know the chorus
of "The Palms" by heart.

The Music that reaches inside the soul of a member who is privately struggling and gives them hope.

The Music that brings comfort to grieving loved ones.

The Music that allows us to send loved ones on to their eternal life with a chorus of 'Hallelujah!'"

The Music that lives on eternally in the heavenly chorus that has some pretty prominent members from McAllister.

Love, Becky

As of this writing, the Organ Restoration Fund is still \$28,681.68 away from the goal of \$87,138. If you are able, please consider making a donation to the fund today. Your gift will allow McAllister's Holtkamp to aid in worship and to sound God's praise for decades to come. With the project now underway, reaching the goal is more important than ever. Thank you.*

Anyone interested in following photos and progress of the restoration of the Holtkamp organ at McAllister Memorial can go to this facebook link:

<https://www.facebook.com/HoltkampatMcAllister>

* Don't worry. We have reached the fundraising goal for the restoration of the organ. This is a report from February – March 2020.

Musical Minute



This Musical Minute is in loving memory and honor of longtime McAllister member, Burdette A. Rupert, Sr. While not a musician himself, Burdette was an avid supporter of the arts and his benevolence was felt not only in the Alleghany Highlands but also far beyond. He enjoyed local live arts performances and also traveled widely and often to take in shows and concerts of various genres.

For decades he warmly welcomed countless numbers of elementary age children and high school students into the Rupert home for piano and voice lessons taught by his gifted wife, Frances Parker Rupert. Along with many McAllister members, he tirelessly supported Frances in both the children's and adult's music ministries during her years as Minister of Music at McAllister. His encouragement, support, and loving hugs bolstered the confidence of all who were blessed to learn under the tutelage of Mrs. Rupert. His steadfast support will be sorely missed by those who were fortunate to know and love him.

April 26, 2020

McAllister Messenger



Musical Minute:

I hope that many of you have been able to tune in to McAllister's live Facebook stream over the last six Sundays. Reverend Jim is giving it his all with meaningful sermons that address both the church season and the current unusual circumstances in our country. His optimism and certainty in God's love for each of us is faith bolstering and comforting. Kathryn Crutchfield is making sure that you receive a beautiful musical offering each Sunday from one of our talented singers. For the first time in my life, I am playing to an empty and almost silent sanctuary each Sunday. Odd times, indeed.

Tarie Warlitzer will be soloing this Sunday, April 26. We texted a few days ago about what she might sing and decided we'd both sleep on it. Amazingly, by the following day when we again texted one another, we both suggested, "This Is My Father's World." It's perfect for Eastertide, perfect for this fresh spring season, and a perfect hymn of assurance during this period of uncertainty. If you have a hymnal at home, take a minute to reflect on the words of this beloved hymn. Many of you, I'm certain, know most of the words by heart. If you are able, step out on your front porch or take a walk in your yard. If you are unable to be outside, try to get a glimpse of this glorious spring from a nearby window and take comfort in the constancy of the changing seasons. We are blessed to live in the beauty of the Alleghany Highlands. The redbud was exquisite this year, the dogwood is now in full bloom, and the goldfinches, dressed in their brilliantly-colored spring finery, turn every tree in which they land into a lemon tree! While you admire God's handiwork, remember: "This is my Father's world: He shines in all that's fair; In the rustling grass I hear Him pass, He speaks to me everywhere."

I miss all of you. I look forward to the time when we can all be together again. The newly restored Great division is back in the organ. It sounds magnificent!

Beth

May 10, 2020

McAllister Messenger



Musical Minute:

After hearing Pastor Jim's rendition of "Rise and Shine and Give God the Glory" during the Children's Sermon last Sunday, brother Nick and I did some reminiscing following the service about our days spent at Camp Fincastle back in the 1970s. What indelible memories—new friends, arts and crafts, bible devotions in beautiful natural surroundings, camper's stew cooked over an open fire, swimming, canoeing, amazing breakfasts (cheese grits!), hayrides, tick checks at the end of each day, sleeping bags damp from dew in the mornings, and singing, singing, singing. It's extraordinary how one song can bring back so many recollections, sensations and smells. I think my favorite verse is the one about the ark:

So Noah, he built him, he built him an arky, arky.
Noah, he built him, he built him an arky, arky. Built
it out of (CLAP) hickory barky, barky, Children of the Lord!

And we can't forget the next verse about the animals embarking by "twosies—Elephants and kangaroosies, roosies!" (As you may have guessed, this song has been running through my head all week! Thanks, Pastor Jim!)

Music has this extraordinary power to transport us to a unique place and time. How many priceless images go through your head when you sing your favorite carol on Christmas Eve? When you hear or sing "The Palms" every year what faces appear in your mind's eye? Your parents, your young children, your younger self?

One of the oddest things about our current situation is being in the quiet sanctuary on Sunday mornings. It's peaceful, of course, but unusual. I look forward to the day when we can once again gather as a church family and raise our voices in song, creating some new musical memories. Until then, take good care. See you soon.

Beth

May 24, 2020

McAllister Messenger



Musical Minute:

In honor of the observance of Memorial Day, my prelude for this Sunday, May 24, is based on the hymn tune THAXTED written by famed English composer Gustav Holst. (Thaxted is a village in Essex, England where Holst lived for many years.) The tune is based on a theme taken from one of Holst's most well-known suites, "The Planets." It is most typically paired with the text, "I Vow to Thee, My Country," a poem written by British diplomat Sir Cecil Spring Rice. According to Wikipedia, Spring Rice was appointed Ambassador to the United States in 1912 and had significant influence on America's decision to join Britain's fight against Germany in World War I. While initially written in the early 1900s, Spring Rice rewrote the poem in 1918 to immortalize the immense loss of life during the horrific conflict. The first stanza of the text addresses dedication to country and the ultimate sacrifice made by those who fought. The second stanza celebrates the Heavenly kingdom that awaits all believers. The words are as follows:

"I vow to thee, my country, all earthly things above,
Entire and whole and perfect, the service of my love;
The love that asks no questions, the love that stands the test,
That lays upon the altar the dearest and the best;
The love that never falters, the love that pays the price,
The love that makes undaunted the final sacrifice.
And there 's another country, I've heard of long ago,
Most dear to them that love her, most great to them that know;
We may not count her armies, we may not see her King;
Her fortress is a faithful heart, her pride is suffering;
And soul by soul and silently her shining bounds increase,
And her ways are ways of gentleness, and all her paths are peace.,,

You can find many stirring renditions of this hymn on YouTube. A particularly moving performance was in 2013 at London's Royal Albert Hall. Just type in THAXTED and Royal Albert Hall in your browser. Both the text and the magnificent tune have proven timeless and provide a thoughtful framework around which to remember those who have died in sacrifice to our country. As an interesting bit of trivia for you royal fans out there, this hymn was sung at the wedding of Princess Diana and Prince Charles and was again performed at Princess Diana's funeral. It was also played at the funeral of U.S. Senator John McCain.

Jun 7, 2020

McAllister Messenger



Musical Minute:

While the church has been empty of late I've had time to reflect on the many wonderful and unique people who have filled McAllister's sanctuary and other spaces through the years. Many of the individuals with whom I had contact, either as a child or young adult, were involved in the music programs and unwittingly left behind what I have come to call "musical relics."

A trip to the music files in the choir room leads to visits with dear friends, many of whom are no longer with us. The names of these beloved members of the McAllister family are written in their own hand across the tops of anthems and cantatas, reminders of their dedication to the church's music ministry. We laugh during the choir rehearsal when someone comes across a funny notation in an old score, something like, "BREATHE!!!!" also, of course, "DON'T BREATHE!" or simply, "WATCH!" or sometimes a pair of googly-eyes drawn in. One can date the notation from whom was conducting the choir at the time. "Watch Frances!", "Watch Anne!", "Watch Susan!", and more recently, "Watch Kathy!"

There is a piece of cardstock which remains permanently on the music rack of the organ with both the "Gloria Patri" and the "Doxology" taped to it, the tape amber with age. It is there for whomever happens to be playing on any given Sunday and I use it every single week. I'm not sure who put it together but I consider it another relic. It has been there for as long as I can remember and judging from the typeface of the text and the musical notation the pages were

taken from a very old hymnal. While I can't date this relic exactly, I am certain that it dates back at least to the eighties.

My dearest relic is my personal copy of the old burgundy hymnal that was given to me by my father. It is meant especially for keyboard players and is spiral-bound so that its pages lay flat. Papa gave it to me when I began to play the organ at McAllister and my maiden name is written in his hand on the publisher's page. I was so proud when he presented it to me. It is now in tatters, the pages yellowed and the spine split. And it is always right next to my piano at home.

No matter which of McAllister's many activities you have taken part in over the years, I hope that you, too, feel surrounded by old friends when you enter the church and walk its halls. I take comfort in the 101-year history of our church and the strength of the members who came before us, and in many cases, raised us. They left their mark on McAllister and its future in tangible and intangible ways. Like us, they at times faced grave circumstances in our country and in the world and also dealt with personal loss, illness and other difficulties. Like us, they worshipped, they sang, they laughed, they worried, and they supported and loved their church family. Most importantly, we know where they put their faith.

Looking forward to a full church when we can all gather safely again,

Beth

June 21, 2020

McAllister Messenger



Musical Minute:

Even with the rain and cooler weather this past week, I've had a sunny "golden-oldie" hymn bouncing around in my head. It's titled "When They Ring the Golden Bells." Copyrighted in 1887, the piece can be found in my copy of the 1938 Cokesbury hymnal which, based on the stamp located on the inside cover, was at one time "Property of Granbery Memorial Sunday School." (Yet another pilfered item in my inherited stash of music!) "Golden Bells" was purportedly a favorite hymn of my great-grandfather Loving. When mom, dad and baby Nick moved to Nashville in the early 1960s for dad to attend school, he made a studio recording (a reel-to-reel tape!) to send to my great-grandparents including some of their most beloved pieces. Andy had it digitalized for me so I can hear Papa in his mid-twenties singing the following joyous chorus celebrating life's end for a person of faith:

"Don 't you hear the bells now ringing, Don 't you hear the angels singing?
'Tis the glory hallelujah Jubilee. (Jubilee.)
In that far-off sweet forever, Just beyond the shining river,
When they ring the golden bells for you and me."

When we still had our precious dog, Zanna, I often found myself singing this chorus while walking her on a beautiful day. When she was a tiny pup and still getting to know me, I think she was at first alarmed to hear me break out into song! Soon she came to trust that it was a sign of my good mood and of a leisurely, long, and happy walk to come.

A favorite hymn can put one's heart at rest, reminding us of our faith, delivering assurance and bringing back memories of loved ones. While we're still practicing social distancing and getting used to the sight of half-empty store shelves and people in masks, I hope that you're able to find a hymn in your heart and mind that will instantly transport you to a bright and sunny place where your faith is invigorated. Happy Father's Day!

Beth

July 5, 2020

McAllister Messenger



Musical Minute:

If you'll bear with me on this one, I promise that we'll eventually get around to a hymn! I read an article in the *Virginian Review* this spring that the year 2020 marked the emergence of the 17-year periodical cicada in southwest Virginia. While the article highlighted the fascinating life cycle of these critters, I didn't think much more of it until they arrived on our doorstep!

I went outside in early June to plant a few flower pots and noticed hundreds and hundreds of pencil-sized holes in the ground. It looked as though someone had come during the night with a knitting needle and poked all around the garden. Andy commented that near one of our paths through the woods it appeared that the earth had been completely turned. What could have caused these mysterious disturbances?! It wasn't long after that the telltale drone began. Aha—the cicadas had emerged right in our backyard! The din was continuous and deafening during daylight hours. We had a delivery person who commented that when he got out of his van, he felt like he was in a science fiction movie and was about to be devoured at any moment by

something unseen. They were with us for several weeks, waking us each morning shortly after 5 am with their seemingly tireless buzzing. (According to the article, male cicadas are the musicians of the family, "singing" in an attempt to attract female mates. The males use "tymbals," a structure including vibrating membranes, on either side of the abdomen under their wings.) The whole process is really quite bizarre and miraculous. Imagine hatching, burrowing underground to remain for 17 years, emerging to complete the mating ritual, and then dying.

While the noise was intense, the insects themselves weren't intrusive, although we're now finding the little molted "husks" from the newly emerged nymphs all around. And frankly, now that they've done what they came to do and have completed their life cycle, the outside seems a little lonely. Luckily, we still have the tree frogs, grasshoppers, peepers, birds, and crickets to keep us company, not to mention our silent friends the turtles, preying mantis, lightening bugs, salamanders, lizards and serpents (shudder!). . . It all puts me in mind of one of my very favorite hymns since childhood:

"All things bright and beautiful, All creatures great and small, All things wise and wonderful; The Lord God made them all. "

Hope that you're able to get outside to enjoy some of what makes a Virginia summer so very special. Happy Fourth of July!

Beth

July 19, 2020

McAllister Messenger



Musical Minute:

The Greatest Generation lost one of its most iconic voices last month with the passing of British entertainer Dame Vera Lynn at the age of 103. Born Vera Margaret Welch, Dame Vera had a long career in music, beginning at the tender age of seven. She is perhaps best known in the United States for two of her greatest hits from the early 1940s, "The White Cliffs of Dover" and "We'll Meet Again." She also recorded the hauntingly beautiful, "A Nightingale Sang in Berkeley Square."

Back in the day she was known as the "Forces' Sweetheart" and for many her voice embodied the steadfast and resilient spirit of wartime Britain. She was beloved for her strong, heartfelt interpretation of songs of love and longing in the time of war. Throughout her life, she was deeply involved in charities promoting veterans' welfare and was also committed to the causes of children. Dame Vera celebrated the 75th anniversary of Victory in Europe on May 8 of this year from home during the pandemic lockdown. With friends and family she sang along to a broadcast of her hit, "We'll Meet Again" after which she reportedly enjoyed "a glass of bubbles!" She was honored during her funeral cortege with a flyover by two World War II era Spitfires. If you're interested in music or history, or both, take a moment to look online where you can learn more about her fascinating life of this remarkable woman. There are countless articles and recordings to be found. While we are not, thankfully, on the brink of a world war, we are currently engaged in our own battle with Covid-19. The lyrics to "We'll Meet Again" seem apt to where we are as a congregation, so I've included the words to the chorus below. I have no doubt that Vera Lynn was right—We will meet again.

"We 'll meet again,

Don 't know where, don 't know when,

But I know we 'll meet again some sunny day.

Keep smiling through,

Just like you always do,

Til ' the blue skies drive the dark clouds far away.,,

Take good care. Beth

August 2, 2020

Musical Minute



Musical Minute:

I received a delightful surprise in the mailbox last week in the form of a letter from my beloved longtime friend, Karen Williams Chichester. As most of you know, Karen is a child of McAllister and also one of McAllister's gifted former organists. She has been following the reconstruction of our Holtkamp from her home in Reedville, Va., and wanted to share a wonderful story about the first occasion the newly installed pipe organ was called to duty for a Sunday service in 1974.

I believe that Karen was in college during the time of the organ installation and was traveling to and from school to play at McAllister on Sundays. Below is an excerpt from her letter.

"I can't help but remember the first Sunday—I was finishing the prelude, the choir came in, and all of a sudden the organ was playing ALL notes, ALL keys and I had to stop and go to the piano. It was absolutely wild! Everything was checked and the next Sunday —same thing! They finally realized that our wonderful tenors and basses needed extra support under the floor. Reinforcement problem solved!"

That's one of the unique things about our amazing mechanical action (tracker action) pipe organ. When a key is depressed on the keyboard, it pulls a tracker in the organ console which pulls a pallet that is directly mechanically linked to the opening at the base of the pipes deep within the organ case. When the key is played, a pallet is pulled, which eventually results in air entering the pipe and the pipe sounding. The combined weight of the manly men of McAllister's choir had the same effect on the trackers that run under the floor from the organ console into the organ case as if Karen had been leaning on the keyboards and pedals with her feet, hands, elbows and forehead! Talk about a joyful noise! Thanks, Karen, for sharing your very special memory about the first cacophonous days of our Holtkamp!

Restoration of the pipe organ continues even while the church remains closed. I am convinced that we could not have found a more qualified professional to carry out the work than Thomas Rohlfs. (And fortunately, Thomas is only in Rocky Mount if we happen to experience

something similar to what happened in 1974!) Thank you all for your extraordinary generosity and support. Take good care and stay well.

Beth

August 30, 2020

McAllister Messenger



Musical Minute:

Pastor Jim's sermon last Sunday delved into Romans 12:1-8 and the unique, equally important role that each of us is suited to play in God's ministry at McAllister and in the world. Romans 12:6 states in part: "We have different gifts, according to the grace given us." I'd like to use this week's Musical Minute to express my thanks to the many vocalists who have shared so generously their unique gifts and valuable time to ensure that the joyful sound of music continues to resound throughout our sanctuary even during this unusually quiet time in the life of our church.

After the shockingly abrupt cessation of in-person services in March, Pastor Jim quickly devised a way to communicate with most of our congregation by livestreaming Wednesday night bible study and Sunday morning services. It wasn't long until several suggested that the Sunday morning service would be greatly enhanced by music, not just instrumental music on the pipe organ and piano, but music from one of God's very greatest gifts, the human voice. Pastor Jim, Kathryn Crutchfield and I discussed it and decided that as long as we maintained proper distance and refrained from hugging (definitely a challenge at a "huggy" church like McAllister) it would be safe to add one additional person to our Sunday morning lineup. Kathryn began immediately to contact singers, first from our own choir and then from other churches. People were remarkably willing, and even eager, to use their talents to aid McAllister's ministry. Almost all mentioned how exhilarating it felt just to sing again at a time when communal singing is discouraged due to Covid -19. And the remarks from you, the congregation, have been so positive on Sunday mornings. I know personally how much your encouragement and kind words mean.

Please join me in thanking our dear, talented musical messengers, those who have brought God's word, and thereby joy and comfort, to us during the last five months: David Crosier, Nick Leitch, Ronnie Linkenhoker, Joe Martin, Rev. Jim Moss, Cathy Rowan, B.R. Rupert, Tammy

Scruggs-Duncan, Tarie Warlitner, Linda Wickham, Dawn Walton Wilson. Pastor Jim, we appreciate you so readily sharing your musical gifts with your uplifting songs for the Children's Sermon. Those songs take many of us back to happy, sunny, youthful days. All of you have different gifts and you have shared them with us with such grace. Thank you.

Take good care, everybody.

Beth

September 13, 2020

McAllister Messenger



Musical Minute:

I was delighted to read in McAllister's newsletter a few weeks ago about the flock of butterflies that would be migrating to members of our congregation as a reminder of new life and unity. Who doesn't love butterflies? As an English major, I've always been a fan of collective nouns, the term we use to refer to a collection of things taken as a whole. Some of them are obvious and quite familiar to us: a herd of deer, a school of fish, an army of ants, a pride of lions, a gaggle of geese, even a bevy of beauties! Still other collective nouns are more fanciful and descriptive in evoking the characteristics of the group or species in question. Some of my favorites are: an exaltation of larks, a rafter of turkeys, a murder of crows, a memory of elephants, a radiance of cardinals (or a conclave as it's called in the Catholic Church!), a clowder of cats.

After reading about McAllister's butterflies, I decided to look up the collective noun for butterflies. On the internet I found several, including a flutter of butterflies, a wing of butterflies and even a kaleidoscope of butterflies. While I like the idea of a flutter of butterflies, we sometimes even call them "flutterbyes," kaleidoscope gets my vote. For me the term best describes the many vivid visitors we've had to our garden and flower pots this summer.

In reflecting on the bounteous beauty that we are blessed to have just outside our doors, the hymn "All Creatures of Our God and King" came to mind. It is a glorious hymn of praise that can be found on page 64 of our hymnal. The original text was written by St. Francis of Assisi in 1225. It was subsequently paraphrased to the lyrics we know today by William H. Draper in the early 20th century. The tune dates to 1623 and was later arranged to the form we know by famed English composer Ralph Vaughan Williams. It opens with the following words of adoration:

"All creatures of our God and King,
Lift up your voice and with us sing,
Alleluia, Alleluia!

In my opinion the joyful, resounding final verse can never be loud enough!

"Let all things their Creator bless, And worship Him in humbleness, O
praise Him, Alleluia!
Praise, praise the Father, praise the Son, And praise the Spirit, three in one,
O praise him, O praise him, Alleluia, Alleluia, Alleluia!'

I hope that McAllister's flutter of butterflies has made a visit to your yard this summer and I look forward to seeing our winged ambassadors on Alleghany Avenue when we are able to return to in-person services.

Take good care.

Beth



September 27, 2020

McAllister Messenger

Musical Minute:

Those able to step outside last weekend were greeted by a bracing touch of the change of seasons. Fall is almost here. I know that we'll still have some day-time highs in the eighties, but the squirrels and other creatures of the forest have made it clear by their increased foraging that the seasons are changing. Don't get me wrong—I enjoy summer. I love my garden. I love basil, tomatoes, peppers, butterflies and blooms, and the chirping of insects on a warm, sultry evening. But by this time of the year, as much as I appreciate a sunny, late summer day, I'm ready to put away the hoe and the watering can and turn my attention to indoor pursuits.

When it comes to enjoying music, there's not much that is off-limits for me. In addition to listening to classical and sacred music, I'm also a big fan of classic jazz. There are some awesome jazz standards about the fall season. "The Falling Leaves" and "Autumn in New York," both of which have been covered by Billie Holiday, Frank Sinatra and countless other crooners, are two favorites. Still, both of those pieces tend toward the melancholy aspects of fall. It was probably about twenty years ago that I discovered Nat King Cole's lilting version of Henry

Nemo's 1941 classic " 'Tis Autumn." To me, it is the very embodiment of fall's promise and distinct beauty:

"Ole Father Time checked so there'd be no doubt;
Called on the north wind to come on out,
then cupped his hands so proudly to shout, La-de-da-de-da-de-dum, 'Tis Autumn.

The trees say they're tired, they've borne too much fruit;
Charmed all the wayside, there's no dispute.
Now, shedding leaves, they don't give a hoot, La-de-da-de-da-de-dum, 'Tis Autumn.

Then the birds got together to chirp about the weather . . .
After making their decision in birdy-like precision, turned about and made a beeline to the south.

My holding you close really is no crime, ask the birds, the trees and Ole Father Time.
It's just to help the mercury climb,
La-de-da-de-da-de-dum, 'Tis Autumn."

What a charming piece! It's been sung by many others, but Nat King Cole's version with his Trio is as smooth as dripping honey. You can listen to it online on YouTube (just type in the title of the song) and celebrate the arrival of autumn! I hope that the onset of cooler weather brings you joy, hope and the peace that comes with the continuity of the changing seasons. I look forward to seeing you in church soon.

Take good care.

Beth

October 11, 2020

McAllister Messenger

Musical Minute:

It was such a joy last Sunday to hear the happy voices of McAllister's members as people entered the doors to the church for morning worship for the first time in many months. While Pastor Jim and I have grown somewhat accustomed to the quietness of the sanctuary during the days of Covid-19 on



Sunday the mood was so familiar, so light and so hopeful. We are wearing masks and practicing social distancing. We Are Back!

Those of us who had planned for as safe a reopening as possible were pleased with Sunday's in-person attendance. And how exciting that many of you who are not yet comfortable returning or able to return for in-person services are continuing to watch from home. After the shock of playing to an essentially empty church in early April, I finally realized that all of you were safely tucked at home—a good place to be in a time of uncertainty. (Most of you were in bunny slippers in my mind's eye!) Your comments on Facebook—to one another, to Pastor Jim, and to me and our soloists—helped me to feel your presence. Even though we weren't in one space last Sunday, I was playing for all of you. I hope that whether you were at home or in the sanctuary, you felt like you were part of the worship experience at McAllister.

For my piano prelude on Sunday, I chose the old American folk hymn HOLY MANNA, commonly sung to the text, "Brethren We Have Met to Worship." It is one of my very favorite hymn tunes and the text seemed particularly fitting for our first day back together. It begins:

"Brethren, we have met to worship

And adore the Lord our God; Will
you pray with all your power,

While we try to preach the Word?

All is vain unless the Spirit

Of the Holy One comes down;
Brethren, pray, and holy manna
Will be showered all around.,,

It was wonderful to have some of our number back in the church again after such a lengthy hiatus and it is nothing short of miraculous to me that we can reach many of our members through the modern marvel of livestreaming. However you chose to join us, please do! We are stronger, in good times and in bad, together.

Take good care.

Beth

October 25, 2020

McAllister Messenger

Musical Minute:



It has been wonderful to have so many of you back in the sanctuary for the last three Sundays. I knew that things would be vastly changed when you returned compared to our last meeting in March, but I was not prepared for the general hush as all of you enter the church and await the start of the service. It has made me consider the difference between "silence" and "quiet."

Pre-pandemic Sundays usually found the choir hurrying up the back stairs after quickly rehearsing the morning's anthem in the choir room. While we waited to be certain that all of us had made it to the top of the stairs and as Pastor Jim warned that he was turning on his microphone, those of us who were first in line would listen at the closed door to the choir loft to get a sense of how many of you might be "outside." Your cheerful chatter always made us smile!

I commented to a church member last week that even with our congregants having returned, the church seemed so silent. "It's not silent. It's peaceful," he said. I've given that some thought.

When brother Nick and I were young, our folks rented a cabin from the Parker family on the Jackson River. It was a place of great joy, exploration, and education about the natural world. Papa, after shaving outdoors in the ice-cold water of the underground spring that miraculously shot forth from the hollowed trunk of a Chestnut tree, was off to work at Westvaco early in the morning. Mom was up hours before Nick and me, working in the garden and preparing for the day. Our days at the camp were full of adventure and fun and the occasional excitement brought on by a snake sighting. I remember going to bed in the evenings, exhausted from swimming from morning until dusk, listening to the crickets and frogs and the sound of the river. We could hear mom and dad talking softly just down the stairs. In our young minds, all was well with the world. It was quiet —peaceful and still—but not silent.

Which makes me think about the value of quiet as opposed to silence. Silence is the absence of sound or noise. Quiet is just that—quietude—a state of calmness and tranquility. Quietude is a chance to take a deep breath, an opportunity to reflect, a moment to just be, maybe a moment to form a silent prayer . . .

While the atmosphere in our sanctuary may be a bit different these days, I hope that you find it to be one of reassurance and serenity. Welcome back to your church home—a place to

reaffirm your faith, renew your spirit and reunite with your McAllister family. It's so good to see you again.

Take good care.

Beth

November 15, 2020

McAllister Messenger

Musical Minute:

I confess that Andy and I are dedicated "porch sitters." Pretty much any evening that the weather is tolerable, from late winter to late fall, will find us spending time on our front porch. We've had such a beautiful Indian summer lately, that we're still enjoying the warm late afternoons outside, listening to the insect sounds and the rustling of squirrels, turkeys and deer foraging for acorns in the fallen oak leaves until the sun sets and a chill begins to fall.



This time of year, I usually step out on the porch in the mornings to gauge the temperature and sweep up any wayward leaves or debris that might have blown in overnight. I'm often shocked by the violence that has occurred during the wee hours. There are red and brown spots and blots on the porch floor and little insect limbs scattered about—remnants of "granddaddy longlegs" spiders and katydids and the occasional stick insect, as remarkable in death as in life, lying in repose with his pin-like angular legs folded somberly over his thin little body. Andy recorded a katydid in slow motion on his phone a week or so ago. It was a marvelous feat of nature, all legs and elbows, crawling up a window on the southwest side of our house, perhaps looking for a safe place to overwinter or a peaceful place to expire. And then there are the ladybugs (or more accurately the Asian lady beetles), of course. They attempt home invasion every year at this time. These are the signs that fall has truly arrived no matter what the weather is trying to convince us.

This time of year, I find myself humming that iconic tune, "Turn! Turn! Turn! (To Everything There Is a Season)" written by Pete Seeger and popularized by the folk rock group the Byrds. Although the order is slightly rearranged, the lyrics for the song are taken, almost word for word, from the book of Ecclesiastes, beginning with, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven." While Seeger wrote the song in the late 1950s and it

was recorded by a couple of other artists, it was the Byrds 1965 rendition that garnered international fame. If you don't have an old recording, you can look it up on YouTube. It's a true classic and a great way to while away an Indian summer afternoon!

Rock and roll, everybody! And take good care, too.

Beth

November 29, 2020

McAllister Messenger

Musical Minute:



Driving home from church Sunday I reflected on how unique the upcoming holidays will be. Andy and I returned to Covington in 2010 after more than twenty years away. Our first Thanksgiving and Christmas were spent quietly with only mom, who was terminally ill, and brother Nick and my sister-in-law Cathy. Despite the circumstances, the holidays were notably joyful with just a tinge of bittersweet. Mom remained steadfastly, even stubbornly, resilient in her final days and managed to set a cheerful tone during her last year.

After losing her in June of 2011 we were invited to Roanoke to celebrate the Thanksgiving feast with my Uncle Jerry and Auntie Miki. Jerry is mom's slightly older brother. Mom, Nick and Cath had been sharing the day with Jerry and Miki and their offspring and friends for years while we were abroad. As the holiday approached, I'll admit that I was struck by a deep sadness. Mom and dad were gone as were both of Andy's parents. Thanksgiving would never be the same again . . . When we arrived in Roanoke, I wasn't eager to join the large gathering. Still—there we stood on the doorstep. Retreating was not an option. Upon entering we were enveloped with hugs, laughter, chatter, and enticing aromas. There were cousins, college friends of Nick and Cathy, school friends of mom and dad, and big, wonderful dogs. (Being dog lovers, Miki and Jerry had encouraged us to bring along our 105-pound Black Russian Terrier, Mila.) As the hours passed, I began to look at my new reality. It wasn't so bad. In fact, it was quite delightful. Mom and dad weren't physically present, but they were there in the stories that were told and the love that was shown. It was almost as though they had prepared this for me in advance, and I suppose, in a way, they had. They spent years investing in the relationships that now provided a

soft spot for me to land. I felt fortunate. I felt blessed. In the years since, thanks to Miki and Jerry's generous heart and their "the more the merrier" attitude, our celebration has come to include two of my college friends and dad's youngest brother. Thanksgiving will be different this year. Andy and I will celebrate "out Potts Creek," my cousins will remain in Colorado and New Jersey, both Coronavirus hotspots, and Nick and Cath will be with Miki and Jerry. All of the extended family and friends will remain safely at home. But our Thanksgiving circle will still exist. Even Covid-19 can't stop it.

I saw a heartwarming segment on CBS news last week. A gentleman in Utah fell victim to the virus in October and was hospitalized and intubated, unable to speak. He wrote a note to his wife asking that she bring his violin to the hospital so that he might play something to thank the medical professionals for their excellent care. Seated on the side of his bed, dressed in a hospital gown and attached to all sorts of medical devices, he chose to play, "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing." Even in such dire circumstances, he felt blessed and thankful. What a beautiful hymn—what a man—and what spirit . . . No matter what your Thanksgiving plans entail, I hope that all of you can find cause to feel blessed and thankful.

Take good care and Happy Thanksgiving.

Beth



Musical Minute:

Saint Nicholas came to visit me early Sunday morning a week ago, as he has done in the wee hours of December sixth for the last 35 years. His miraculous visits can be attributed to the fact that in July of 1985, I began dating a first-generation American whose Polish parents had celebrated the St. Nicholas holiday in their native land and continued this beautiful tradition by sharing it with their three American-born sons. Before Andy and I married, my Saint Nicholas parcel (along with some goodies for mom and dad) magically appeared on the back porch on Lexington Ave. This Sunday, I heard the crinkle of my tissue-paper-wrapped bundle being placed on the nightstand just about the time the sun began to rise. St. Nicholas Day, Dzień Świąteczny Mikolaja, marks the start of the Christmas holiday season in Poland and since I've known Andrew, it does the same in our household. St. Nicholas Day is not like Christmas, but the St. Nicholas package is festively wrapped and always contains some sweets, dried fruit, gold wrapped chocolate coins, occasionally an orange or a mandarin, and usually some small, practical item, such as a comb, a pair of socks, or lip balm. This year mine contained a jar of Grey Poupon Country Style Mustard, a first in my St. Nicholas bundle!

When we lived in the Czech Republic, we learned that St. Nicholas (Mikuláš) celebrates the holiday as part of a trio. Whether in the capital city of Prague or in any tiny village across the country, on the night of December 5 (the eve of St. Nicholas Day in the Christian calendar), you will find St. Nicholas (dressed in his mitred cap and flowing gown) making the rounds accompanied by an angel and the devil. Some folks dress up just for fun to meet children passing in the street, but others visit the homes of friends with children. They ask the children how they've behaved over the previous year. If the kids answer that they were good and can perhaps recite a short St. Nicholas poem or sing a song, they are rewarded with sweets. Technically, the devil is there to give ill behaved little ones a lump of coal, but thankfully this never happened to any of our little Czech friends.

When we moved to Austria, we discovered that a horrifying creature known as Krampus roams the cities and villages on St. Nicholas Eve. In some parts of Austria, he accompanies St. Nicholas, but in the region where we lived, he lurks the streets alone. I know from experience that he is a terrifying beast—sort of a cross between a Yeti and a Sasquatch, but far more menacing, with matted hair, long horns, claws and a birch whip. He wears cow

bells to alert the unwary of his approach. And the basket that is often carried on his back is large enough to carry spoiled little ones to who knows what terrible fate. Yikes . . . One December when Andy was traveling, I agreed to meet a friend in a neighboring city on St. Nicholas Eve. She promised it was one of the best Krampus celebrations in the area. It was fun ___ for a while. There was a parade, fireworks, delicious food, the traditional Kristkindlmarkt, and bright lights. Then came the dark, solitary walk to my car for the 40 minute drive home. No exaggeration, but Krampus was everywhere—around every corner, at the end of every alley, hidden behind cars, seemingly appearing out of nowhere. Who knew the ringing of a bell could bring such a chill? Remember the young fellows who show up on your doorstep long after they should have given up on Halloween? These were their scarier older brothers. Obviously, no harm was done, but the memory still makes my heart race.

In the end, my early December alliance will forever remain with St. Nicholas. History tells us that he was a Christian figure of Greek descent born in modern-day Turkey in the year 270. Although there is very little actual documentation about his life, his reputation for generosity and secret gift-giving grew in early Christianity and throughout the centuries, eventually evolving into our jolly elf, Santa Claus. If you'd like to know more, there is a wealth of information, including some wonderful hymns that pay homage to St. Nicholas, at the following website: stnicholascenter.org. In visiting the website, I learned that there is a permanent St. Nicholas exhibit installed at Virginia Theological Seminary in Alexandria. It seems that the spirit of St. Nick is closer than we knew!

Take good care. **Beth**

Dear members and friends of McAllister Memorial Presbyterian Church

There can be no doubt that the year 2020 has been like no other in our lifetime. So many in our region and throughout the world have dealt with extreme anxiety, hardship, and loss. Even in such unprecedented times and with so many obstacles, McAllister's ministries have been the face of God's grace and generosity to those in need.

Our church family is strong and I am amazed that live-streaming technology has allowed us to remain connected this year. Whether in-person or remotely, I cherish every Sunday that we can worship together. I am honored to be a part of our church's music ministry and I hope that you have enjoyed the Musical Minutes delivered via the McAllister Messenger.

I welcome 2021, but I don't write off 2020. In 2020, people fell in love, beautiful babies with all the potential in the world were born, the seasons changed, as they always do, and humans accomplished extraordinary things on behalf of their fellow human beings. God is good, always.

I wish you strength, happiness and good health in the coming year. Take good care.

Beth

Elizabeth Leitch Dreszer
Organist