

GOSPEL CHOIR

“When we sing, we pray twice”

~ St. Augustine ~



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*“Let the word of God dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom;
and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God.”*

Colossians 3:16

VISION & MISSION STATEMENT

Music ministry is one of the most important ministries in any church. Music ministry enhances the worship space and “...is a vehicle that ushers in the presence of God. It sets and establishes an atmosphere that is conducive to worship, enabling the presence of God to move freely among the congregation, and allowing each person in the congregation to experience the Spirit on a personal level.”¹ As a music ministry, our primary mission is to glorify God. We seek to do this by simply giving our gifts back to the Creator through song. We approach every rehearsal and worship service with a spirit of gratitude because we accept that all that we are, and all that we have, has been given in grace by God. We recognize that “every good gift and every perfect gift is from above.”²

As choir members, we are called to be good stewards of those gifts and resources given to us by the Creator. The Gospel Choir is committed to consistently ministering through music to the Progressive Christian Worship Community. Through music that is primarily rooted in the African-American gospel tradition, we minister to others, we celebrate our lives, and we celebrate the many ways we come to God. As music ministers, we help usher persons to experience God/Creator/Divine Mystery/Sovereign/Great Ground of Being.

We are a unique Gospel Choir. Our members come from all over the world. Hence, we are multiracial, multicultural, and some of us adhere to different faiths. Our unity in spirit enables us to celebrate one another and empower others on their journeys. Music is universal and reaches persons at the deepest levels. It has the ability to penetrate and heal the deepest despair and engender hope. With so much unrest in our world, we are in dire need of the good news, the Gospel; the Gospel that loves and welcomes not the rhetoric that rejects and judges. This Gospel Choir seeks to bring and **be** that good news!

We've come a long way! The St. Lawrence University Gospel Choir (now simply called "The Gospel Choir") was founded in the fall semester of 2002 under the leadership of Margaret Kent Bass, Kathleen Buckley and Barry Torres. The choir began with a handful of committed SLU students. Today, the Gospel Choir sings on a weekly basis in the Progressive Christian Worship Service each Sunday at 5:00pm in Gunnison Chapel, under the leadership of Shaun Whitehead and Barry Torres. The choir has performed at various events and churches in the Canton/Potsdam area. The Gospel Choir is comprised of students, faculty and staff from the Associated Colleges and friends from the North Country community. As is the case with campus organizations, the choir is ever changing. The choir typically numbers 10-15 members. We hope to continue our growth. The choir remains open for membership throughout the year. No experience necessary, just a willing spirit! To God be the glory for the things God has done!

***"O sing unto the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth.
For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised..."***

Psalm 64:1&4

CHOIR POLICIES

The Gospel Choir is a volunteer, non-auditioned choir that provides the music ministry for the Progressive Christian Worship Service sponsored by the St. Lawrence University Chaplain's Office. Membership in the choir is open to and inclusive of the whole North Country Community. We are a multi-faith, multi-cultural, and racially, ethnically and economically diverse musical organization. As the Chapel's church choir we are committed to making the very best music we can, in support of the ministry of Progressive Christian Worship as outlined below.

[Principles of the Progressive Christian Worship Service](http://www.stlawu.edu/chapel/pcw.php) - taken from the Chaplain's Office website - <http://www.stlawu.edu/chapel/pcw.php>

"Whoever you are, and wherever you find yourself on life's journey, you are welcome here!"*

*(Adapted from the United Church of Christ)

1. Whereas the service is rooted in the Christian tradition, we acknowledge, honor, and celebrate the many ways we find our way to God
2. Collective wisdom is important, i.e. not solely priest-led
3. Focuses on compassion versus dogma
4. Multiracial and multicultural
5. Uses inclusive language for God and humanity
6. Inclusive and welcoming of others

All are welcome to join in making a joyful noise in praise of the God of all creation and in support of one another.

MEMBERSHIP RESPONSIBILITIES...

While we are a volunteer and non-auditioned choir, we strive for quality music-making to the best of our ability. Quality is achieved through consistent, disciplined and spirited rehearsal and performance. We ask that each choir member make the commitment to be at all rehearsals and services.

1. A full year commitment can be challenging for some, therefore we advocate membership on a semester by semester basis. We rehearse every Friday from 5:00pm to 6:00 pm and sing at Sunday worship. Call for the 5:00 pm service is 4:30pm. Band members should arrive 15 minutes early for set-up.
2. In an ideal world we'll all be at every rehearsal and service, but we realize that there will be situations that will prevent you from attending. While we do not want to set rigid requirements we do expect regular attendance. If you cannot make either a rehearsal or services please notify Shaun or Barry ahead of time so that we can make plans accordingly.
3. Please be on time for rehearsals and service calls. Also notification of lateness is appreciated.
4. If a Friday rehearsal is missed, arrival at the following Sunday call by 4:30pm is mandatory. If you show up late for Sunday you will be asked to join the congregation.
5. If attendance problems are consistent Shaun and/or Barry will discuss the situation with you. We emphasize again that consistent attendance is a necessary element of the choir's growth and success.
6. Each choir member will be given a notebook with word sheets for songs and other choir materials. Members are welcome to leave their choir notebooks in the chapel. If you need to take your notebook home, please bring it with you to every choir rehearsal. While we mostly sing from memory we do use the books in performance occasionally.
7. A half-semester schedule of choir songs along with 2 cd's will be handed out at the beginning of the semester. We will provide a ***gospel choir cd*** of upbeat and slow songs for the choir to learn. We will also provide the choir with a cd of ***congregational songs*** that the choir must know in order to lead the congregation in singing in worship. Please feel free to take the cds home to familiarize yourself with the songs before rehearsal.
8. Song requests are accepted. We encourage you to contact Shaun or Barry with your favorites so that we may include them in the schedule. We acknowledge that given the time constraints of the semester, we may not be able to honor all requests.
9. If you are interested in solo work contact Shaun or Barry. Appropriateness of the solo and soloist is up to the discretion of Barry and Shaun.
10. If you'd like to invite someone to sing with us as a guest they are warmly welcome, but must be able to attend the Friday rehearsal before Sunday service. Please consult with Shaun or Barry before making the invitation.
11. On occasion we accept invitations to perform in other venues. These will be planned well in advance and in consultation with the members. We understand that there is a limit to how much we can do. However our purpose in singing is always to "praise God in the sanctuary."
12. Since 2004 we have sponsored "Got Spirit?" a 3-day Gospel Music Workshop and Concert held in Gunnison Chapel at SLU. Mr. William R. Hamilton of the Chicago Mass Choir has been our workshop leader since the beginning. Participation is open to everyone. Since its inception, students, faculty and staff from the Associated Colleges have joined us, as well as North Country community members. Persons of all cultures and faith traditions have united for this awesome event held each spring. Look for it in the spring semester.
13. We have a website! http://www.stlawu.edu/chapel/gospel_choir.html
14. Finally, attitude is all-important. We need to be alert physically, mentally and, most of all, spiritually. Making music is a total-involvement activity – mind, body and spirit. We know that sometimes it feels like the inspiration is just not there. Trust us – it's there, we just need to be there. When you come, it comes!

“When we sing, we announce our existence.”

~ Bernice Johnson Reagon ~

Activist, scholar and founder of a cappella vocal group, Sweet Honey in the Rock

¹ Joe Pace, *From Performance to Praise; Moving Music Ministry to the Next Level.* (Nashville TN, 2004)

² James 1:17 (New Revised Standard Version)