

## ***Faith Soars Through Music***

*1 Corinthians 14:6-12 ~ ~ June 14, 2026*

Rev. Ruth Shilling Hainsworth, Pastor  
*UCC Westerly, Pawcatuck, CT*

Welcome to UCC Westerly's celebration of our Music Ministry program here at our church, and especially the celebration of all the many persons who make this vital ministry happen in our church. As you know, we are a small church but our music ministry is thriving – just like the rest of this remarkable small congregation! This is due to a constellation of factors which have come together in a unique way at this point in the history of our church. We always pause on one Sunday in June to say farewell to the choirs as they take their annual summer break. But this year I thought we needed to make this much more of a celebration throughout the whole service instead of just a brief round of applause on the final Sunday they appear before heading off to summer. I want to thank all of you for being here to support these wonderful, talented and generous folks who are the heart and soul of our program.

We've already given them their Certificates and Appreciation Gifts and shared a little about their gifts and talents. But I would like to talk for just a little bit about how music generally is such a vital part of the worship experience here and in most other churches. Now as many of you are already aware, there are churches right here in our communities who have huge and amazing music programs, Christ Church and Central Baptist to name two. Many of you have also mentioned to me about the times while on your travels you have visited various other churches who have full blown staged music performances during their worship services, complete with dancing and even light shows in some cases. Yes. That does happen. But I am so glad it does not happen here. Why? For lots of reasons. The bad theology of most praise music being one. The performative sense of the entire music element of worship being another. Music during

worship should touch your heart, yes. But it should not ever be just entertaining. In today's text from his second letter to the church in Corinth, the Apostle Paul reminds us so beautifully that music is part of the language, the entire experience of worship. It is indeed prayer. Even more than that music performed in worship is one of the spiritual gifts Paul urges us to cultivate and strive to excel in to bring even more depth of meaning to our worship. Our musical program does exactly that, to the best of their abilities. This designation of musical gifts as one of the essential spiritual gifts is why worship music should not be like going to a concert. Music is, after all, a form of prayer, one of the oldest and richest in the millennia the church has been in existence. Music performed within a worship service which originates from a place of deep faith and love for God will always be transformative to both the performer and the listener, as that is what it's supposed to be. You have but to page through our hymnal to see all the famous names of composers and lyricists whose love for God comes alive through the notes and words they weave together.

What most folks don't know is that music is officially recognized as one of the learning modalities or styles used by some people. This refers to the reality that not all people learn in the same way. I know this seems odd when we've all been taught to think about learning as something that happens when you're reading a book or solving a math problem or studying a foreign language and that is correct of course. But learning is also more complicated than the simple of actions we take to understand the information we receive. The fact is that every single person has a preferred way in which they learn. Most of us are not even aware of our learning style, but it's there. So, what do I mean by this? Think back to any of our classrooms while you were growing up. Got a picture of that in your mind? Good. Now, wasn't there always one kid bouncing around the room or at the very least bouncing a leg or tapping a pencil on the desk? Chances are that child did not have ADHD but rather was a kinesthetic learner. This is

someone who learns best if they are able to move around while they're concentrating on whatever it is they are trying to work out. The kids with this unconventional learning style are often the ones who hate school because they literally cannot learn in the way in which a traditional classroom environment teaches. More traditional learning styles which often go unnoticed are:

- Visual – someone who learns best by looking at pictures, diagrams, charts, etc.
- Reading/Writing – someone who learns best from written materials, either through reading or writing or both
- Auditory – someone who learns best through listening to the material, perhaps even reading it aloud for themselves.
- Social/Solitary – this refers to those folks who thrive on group projects and learn best by studying with a group and those who hate group projects and loathe study groups because they do much better on their own.
- Musical – Musical learners – no doubt some of our own church musicians fall into this category – learn best when music is a part of the learning environment for them. This can mean listening to music always in the background while working on school or work projects. Or someone who is always humming while trying to figure something out.

I wanted us to take a moment to think about learning styles this morning because, whether we realize it or not, every time we step into the church, we are learning and, hopefully, our worship engages the learning styles of those who come. Let me explain. The space we encounter visually, whether or not it is clean, pleasant and inviting, teaches us a lot right off the bat about the church and how much its people care about the property and, by extension, each other. During worship we read together in the unison prayers and the responsive readings. We hear the Word read and preached and prayed. And then there is music – probably one of the most powerful and effective ways

in which we learn about God and faith and Jesus. Music during worship – whether we are singing it ourselves or listening as it is performed – fills our heads and our hearts, bathing us in the sacred as long as the music lasts. Music enfolds us in ways nothing else can or will during worship. And that is what we are celebrating today. This vitally important space music holds in the life of this congregation, often without our even recognizing it.

I'd like to conclude today with a poem by Ralph Waldo Emerson, a Unitarian and one of the founders of what became known as Transcendentalism. There's just something in this poem he titled "To Music," which rings true to me. I hope it touches you as well:

*Let me go where'er I will,  
I hear a sky-born music still:  
It sounds from all things old,  
It sounds from all things young,  
From all that's fair, from all that's foul,  
Peals out a cheerful song.*

*It is not only in the rose,  
It is not only in the bird,  
Not only where the rainbow glows,  
Nor in the song of woman heard,  
But in the darkest, meanest things  
There always, always something sings.*

*T'is not in the high stars alone,  
Nor in the cup of budding flowers,  
Nor in the redbreast's mellow tone,  
Nor in the bow that smiles in showers,  
But in the mud and scum of things  
There always, always something sings.*

Always, Always, something sings. Dear ones, may you always hear in some way the music of God's Creation. Thank you, thank you to our dear church musicians. We love you. We appreciate you. We'll miss you 'til the next time you perform for us. Amen.