

**A Vision for an Enhanced Music Ministry  
at Dunbar Heights United Church  
April 2008**

**What is Worship for?**

*“The glory of God is a human being fully alive.”* St. Irenaeus, second century CE

*“Worship is about human beings becoming fully alive, fully the human beings they were created to be. In worship, we create the space for people to reflect upon their lives, to confess the truth about their lives, and to embrace the healing that will help them be fully alive.*

*As worship leaders, we are given the task of setting the tone and creating the atmosphere in which people can feel safe to risk and to be honest about their lives as they open their hearts to the Creator of Life. We shape holy space in which people can step outside of their everyday routine...*

*Worship declares to us that God intends for us to be human beings fully alive, reflecting God’s glory and living God’s love in this world.”*

*Susan Lukey, 2007 Summer / Autumn Gathering*

The choir and music leadership have been integral in providing solid, consistent and dedicated leadership, over a long period of time when there was a high turnover of ministers and staff associates. The choir, choir director and organist have all served to bring stability and constancy in changing and anxious times, which has strengthened the worship service and the congregation as a whole.

When Rev. Michelle arrived at Dunbar Heights United Church nearly 5 years ago, she recognized it was a high priority to leave worship unchanged, as it is so central to the life of the congregation. Therefore, the liturgy, or order of worship, at DHUC has remained relatively static over the last five years, as has our music ministry. Any change in worship provokes anxiety, even when such changes come to be valued and appreciated as time passes. Rev. Michelle felt called to work on spiritual and personal growth in other areas of our life together, such as Bible Study, spiritual practices, and the building up a new ministry with children and youth.

The church council believes the time is ripe to consider how our worship service is called to reflect the growth that we are experiencing, both spiritually and numerically. It is important to consider how best to engage children, youth and adults in worship, in ways that help us all grow into human beings “fully alive.” Worship is foundational in Christian formation and in the transmission of the faith to the next generations.

One of the most important ways we learn, express and shape our faith, is through music and singing. The music of our faith should be “in our bones.” We are blessed to have a variety of music to sing, from the past and the present, from our own heritage, and from around the world.

## A Shift in Focus

*“A good song, well taught and appropriately integrated into worship, in itself unites those gathered as the body of Christ. To paraphrase 1 Corinthians 14:15, people will sing with spirit if they understand what they are to sing and why they are singing it...Music – sung, played, or danced – has a capacity to weave itself into the fabric of an experience and to transform individuals into a vital singing, praying community.” (C. Michael Hawn)*

Currently, our music ministry primarily focuses on **providing** music for the congregation, to assist in its worship: the choir anthem, prelude, offertory, postlude, and hymn accompaniment.

During her most recent Performance Review in Spring 2007, Rev. Michelle was encouraged to provide worship that included more culturally diverse music, a wider genre of good quality music, more music in which the congregation could participate and some opportunities for more innovative and “untraditional” worship. A significant proportion of the congregation, including but not limited to those who are youth, young adults and those with young families, expressed a desire for a more lively and participatory music ministry.

In order to sustain the growth we have experienced, Council believes it is time to work toward an enhanced music ministry, that is more **participatory, inclusive, intergenerational and culturally diverse**. This ministry would expand beyond specialized music providers (organist, pianist, choir) who make music for the congregation, to a ministry that also **involves** the entire congregation in learning, singing, playing (and dancing) our song.

## Ways this Could be Explored

**Teaching:** An enhanced music ministry would include the choir and music director committing to teach the congregation new, old, simple and complex music. The goal would be a congregation confident in lifting up its singing to God. This could be explored through singing with children and youth in different contexts and practicing different methods of teaching new songs to the congregation in worship. Short-term opportunities such as singing and music workshops could be offered to help regular congregational members feel more confident in singing aloud. The congregation could join the choir for an introductory period, such as Advent, Lent, or post Easter.

**Choir:** The choir would intentionally aim at enlivening the congregation’s singing by acting as sectional leaders for part singing. As well as singing anthems to God on behalf of the congregation, the choir could include ways for the congregation to participate in the anthem, such as during the refrain, or moving to the rhythm of the music.

**Instrumentation:** An enhanced music ministry would make it a priority to seek out and include contributions from children, youth, guest musicians, and our own instrumentalists. The goal would be to enhance our relationship with our developing musicians and to create more opportunities for the Spirit to surprise us with a new musical voice. The music would be a faithful reflection of who we really are as a congregation, and as a world community.

**Congregational Events:** An enhanced music ministry would make it a priority for music to be a part of congregational events. This might be explored by drawing on the talents of young and resident musicians and celebrating their achievements. Musical evenings would help to enrich our sense of DHUC as a community that values good music.

**Technical Aids:** An enhanced music ministry would take advantage of computer programs, sound technology and projection screens to assist the congregation in “lifting up its voice.” An upgraded sound system would improve the ability of children and youth to be heard by elder members of the congregation.

**Liturgical Flow:** An enhanced music ministry would be attentive to the ways music is essential in under-girding the “flow” of the worship service. Together with the Minister of Word, Sacrament and Pastoral Care, the music leadership would be intentional in the ways music is integrated into the larger theme and flow of the service including considerations of instrumentation, text, tune, tempo and style, based on what would best enhance the flow of worship and include all. An enhanced music ministry would always be considering ways that music can facilitate a deeper encounter with God.