

# Our Vision for Music Ministry at Incarnation

Episcopal Church of the Incarnation  
Santa Rosa, California

Music Discernment Team  
Summer 2022

Matthew Elias  
Lisa Jang  
Sara Joslyn  
Kathleen Kane  
Rebecca Kendall

Linelle Lane  
Karen Lockert  
Laura McLellan  
Connie Sinclair  
Nancy Wegge

Stephen Shaver, Rector



## **I. Where We've Been**

Music has long graced our worship at Incarnation. Our music has provided us with joy, celebration, serenity, prayerfulness, the expression of sorrow and grief, and the comfort of community and long Christian tradition.

Until 2020, Incarnation had three Sunday services at 8:00, 9:00, and 11:15. The 8:00 service was a spoken Rite I Holy Eucharist. 9:00 was a Rite II Eucharist with musical leadership from organ and the Alleluia Choir; 11:15 was a Rite I Eucharist with organ and the St. Cecilia Choir. The 11:15 service was characterized largely by classical and traditional music, while the 9:00 service included that music as well as other selections such as spirituals, more contemporary music, and versions of old beloved hymns.

The St. Cecilia Choir has historically required choral experience and sight-reading skills; its members vested in choir robes and sat as a body in the church chancel. The Alleluia Choir has invited all to join regardless of experience, with some members reading music and others not. Its members have worn street clothes and sat in the pews during the service, coming up to sing an anthem at the time of the offertory. From 1997 to 2021, the St. Cecilia Choir was directed by Carol Menke. From 2002 to 2014 the Alleluia Choir was directed by Melissa Craig-Morse; after a series of short-term directors, Mary Kennaugh became Alleluia Choir director in 2016. At one time there were also separate organists for the 9:00 and 11:15 services, but since 2013 a single organist has served at both; since 2016 this has been Robert Young.

Our organ is Opus 3759 of Casavant of Montreal, built in 1997 (two manuals and pedals, 25 stops, 32 ranks; movable tablet console, compass 61/3; electro-pneumatic action). We have a Perzina upright piano in the church as well as an Acrosonic upright in our music room and a grand piano in our fellowship hall. In 2018 parishioners funded the purchase of a 25-bell, two-octave set of handbells.

Other aspects of our pre-pandemic music program have included concerts and Evensong services by Cantiamo Sonoma, an a cappella community choir directed by Carol Menke; a longstanding Good Friday concert with the St. Cecilia Choir, Cantiamo Sonoma, and often an orchestra; and an annual Cabaret performed by St. Cecilia Choir members serving as a fundraiser for the Good Friday concert. A monthly Taizé/Sung Prayer service was led and accompanied on the guitar by Robin O'Brien, and an assortment of other alternative or contemplative music-focused services were offered in past years. A group led by Devi Mathieu met weekly on Monday evenings to chant music of Hildegard von Bingen. For some time in the past (though not since about 2015), a monthly Discovery Sunday saw our children and

youth take leadership roles in the 9:00 service. Other special events have occurred from time to time, such as a Vigil Against Gun Violence liturgy during Lent 2019 in which both combined choirs performed “Murder of Innocence,” a composition by parishioner Beverly Kinnison.

Two recent events have led to our current music visioning process. First, the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted all our regular activities. From March 2020 through April 2021 essentially all our music-making was done on Zoom. Our three-service Sunday schedule became a single service at 10:00 a.m. Early in the pandemic Carol Menke and Robert Young began pre-recording each week’s hymns, which we played during the services so members could sing along (muted) from home. Meanwhile our Alleluia Choir began making virtual anthems as parishioner John Nykamp and a team of helpers wove together separately recorded tracks submitted by choir members from home. John’s skillful and generous effort has been deeply appreciated by our community as well as shared throughout the diocese. By fall 2020 our St. Cecilia Choir had resumed rehearsals, outdoors and distanced, and pre-recorded its own anthems for Zoom services that way. By late spring 2021 we had resumed a weekly indoor 8:00 service and an outdoor 10:00 service with congregational singing and a pre-recorded choral anthem, alternating weeks between the two choirs. The 10:00 service returned indoors in fall 2021.

Second, our longtime St. Cecilia Choir director Carol Menke resigned at the end of 2021. Given Carol’s long tenure, her departure marks a major shift in our music ministries. She and her musical gifts are missed by many members of our community, especially those who had attended the 11:15 service.

## **II. Where We Are: Our Program**

In light of the combination of the pandemic disruption (with its shift to only one 10:00 service with music in place of the previous two) and Carol's departure, Pastor Stephen invited us into a season of discernment and visioning for our music ministries. He asked Mary Kennaugh and Robert Young to continue as our music staff in an interim capacity through summer 2022, with Mary serving as director of a new unified Parish Choir and Robert as organist, and both eligible to apply for permanent positions once the visioning process was complete. Meanwhile Stephen convened all who wanted to participate into a Music Discernment Team to explore options, including practices of sister churches, to listen to the congregation, and to create a music program that would best reflect all of us. This team has read portions of books on church music by Marti Rideout and Matthew Hoch, visited three Episcopal parishes known for their music programs (All Souls and St. Mark's in Berkeley and St. Gregory's in San Francisco) and met with their music directors, engaged in extensive discussion on our own experiences of church music, and facilitated a congregational survey as well as a congregational town hall meeting. Results from the survey and town hall are at [incarnationsantarosa.org/reflecting-on-our-congregational-music-survey/](http://incarnationsantarosa.org/reflecting-on-our-congregational-music-survey/).

The Parish Choir, which is open to all interested parishioners, currently numbers about 20 and includes most of those who previously sang in the Alleluia Choir, as well as a few from the St. Cecilia Choir and others in the congregation. In a similar style to the Alleluia Choir, the Parish Choir today sits unvested in the congregation and goes up to sing the offertory anthem. The songs that are chosen are primarily classical but also sometimes pull from gospel and other genres. The choir is usually accompanied on the piano or organ.

In fall 2021 we began a weekly Children's Chapel for our preschool and elementary-age children during the Liturgy of the Word of the 10:00 service. Music for this service is led on the guitar by Robin O'Brien. Robin has also led us in song at some intergenerational parish fellowship and formation events, an offering much appreciated.

One positive aspect of this difficult pandemic time has been the melding of a collective community at the 10:00 service. It has been noted by many that musical and liturgical differences have resulted in a sense of separateness between the 9:00 and 11:15 communities. Two years of worshiping together as one body have significantly lessened this sense of separateness. While we hope our numbers will eventually return to a point where we will once again return to 9:00 and 11:15 services, we don't anticipate this happening in the 2022-23 program year, and our intent is to build a unified music program centered around a single 10:00 service.

### **III. Where We Are: Our Repertoire**

At Incarnation we are passionate about music! The sound of the organ, the high quality of our choirs, and other musical concerts and events are all part of our musical culture.

In our music survey, the top theme in the written responses was “love of traditional music / hymns” and this is reflected in our current repertoire. We primarily use *The Hymnal 1982* while occasionally pulling from *Wonder, Love, and Praise*, a 1997 supplement to the hymnal. Some of our frequently sung hymns include “Praise, My Soul, the King of Heaven”, “Lord, Dismiss Us With Your Blessing,” and “Guide Me, O Thou Great Jehovah.” Recent choral offertory anthems include “Grant Us Thy Peace (Da Nobis Pacem)” by Felix Mendelssohn/edited by Olaf C. Christiansen, “At the name of Jesus” by Christopher Walker, “He, watching over Israel” by Felix Mendelssohn, and traditional spiritual “I’m a Child of God” arranged by Robert Young.

We have recently been using “Gloria in excelsis” S278 for our Song of Praise and a Taizé setting (“Kyrie, kyrie eleison”) for the Prayers of the People. We currently are using Simplified Anglican Chant settings for the psalms, with a single tone used for a season at a time (pre-pandemic, the St. Cecilia Choir regularly chanted the 11:15 psalm in Anglican chant, while the 9:00 congregation typically sang a Simplified Anglican Chant setting). Our collect and Eucharistic Prayer are typically chanted.

Service recordings and bulletins are available at [incarnationsantarosa.org/livestreamed-services/](http://incarnationsantarosa.org/livestreamed-services/).

#### **IV. Where We're Going: The Program We Seek**

After visiting three parishes, deep discussions among our Music Discernment Team, and listening to our congregation here at Incarnation, we have begun to identify some commonalities among us, and a tentative vision is beginning to emerge.

There are two major categories that seem to sum up our desires for the future: (1) We will have a unified music program; and (2) our choir will enhance our worship through its leadership.

*(1) We will have a unified music program.*

One of the greatest challenges of our music program over the past decades has been a sense of fragmentation. While we have been led by excellent musicians, each has held only a portion of the vision for our church's music program, with three or even four staff members each responsible for their own piece of the whole. At times this has manifested in a sense of separateness or even rivalry between our choirs and services. While our music staff have generally been able to maintain collegial relationships with one another, the potential for creative and personality differences has always been present. Juggling schedules has made regular meetings rare and creative collaboration difficult. Even at best, dispersing the responsibility for choosing hymnody, service music, organ selections, and choral repertoire among multiple part-time musicians has made a unified approach to liturgical planning extremely challenging.

After lengthy discernment, our team has come to the decision that it is time to seek a single Director of Music. This has not been a simple decision, as Incarnation has been served by separate choir directors and organists for at least the past twenty-five years. We also love and greatly value our two interim staff who serve in these roles. Yet we have come to this decision unanimously. We are aware that, large cathedrals aside, most Episcopal congregations are served by a single music minister. We know that there are professionals who see themselves as called to a holistic ministry of liturgical planning, choir direction, organ and piano performance, and pastoral leadership. We seek such a leader to help us carry the whole vision for our music ministry and develop it into a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Some characteristics of the music program we hope for include the following:

- We will no longer see ourselves as primarily "9:00-ers" or "11:15-ers." The breadth and diversity of our musical and liturgical life will be experienced throughout the course of the year rather than divided between two separate services. Even if and when we return in a future year to a 9:00/11:15 schedule,

having a single director in charge of music will help us maintain a more unified musical culture.

- Hymns, service music, choral anthems, and organ and other instrumental music will have been chosen in concert with one another and in close consultation with clergy and other liturgical leaders, creating a synergy that helps us deepen our experience of worshiping through music.
- A balance of old and new music will help us experience the joy of singing familiar music with our whole hearts while also “singing a new song to the Lord.”
- More “meat” will have been added to the presently existing “good bones” of our program:
  - We would like to start a children’s choir.
  - We would like to bring back practices that fell away during COVID times, like a song to accompany blessings at the weekly thanksgivings.
  - We would like to add special services throughout the year, such as All Souls’ Day, Lessons and Carols, and/or Evensong liturgies for feast days and special seasons. (See below for our parishioners’ responses to possible ways we might expand our music programs in the future.)
  - We are interested in reviving the idea of Discovery Sundays, once-monthly occasions where our 10:00 service is more intentionally planned to be intergenerational, with music choices reflecting that. This should not be “cute” or “dumbed down” or designed to put children on display but would emphasize singability, accessibility to nonreaders, etc, with our Children’s Chapel music leader taking a leadership role.

From our music survey:

*“There are lots of different ways we could consider expanding our music program in the future. Some possible ideas are below. Please rank them ...” (ranked 1-7, with 7 being the top choice)*

Special services throughout the year, like Evensong or Lessons and Carols—5.7

Starting a children’s choir—4.3

Organ recitals by our own or visiting organists—4.2

Concerts by our Incarnation choirs—4.0

Concerts by community music ensembles—3.8

Starting a handbell choir—3.0

Music at more parish events outside worship, like coffee hour or fellowship events—2.9

*(2) Our choir will enhance our worship experience through its leadership.*

In our conversations about music, we have found the concept of “polarities” useful. A polarity is a pair of seemingly opposite values, both of which are good and important. An important polarity for us at Incarnation is that between participation and excellence.

On the one hand, we greatly value the participation of all in our music ministries, both in the broader sense that the whole congregation is involved in making music together, and in the narrower sense that anyone regardless of experience should be able to find a place in our organized music programs. We value having low barriers to entry.

On the other hand, we also greatly value musical excellence. As our website puts it, “At Incarnation, we consider beauty to be proof for the existence of God. The indescribable beauty of music bears God into our very hearts and souls.” We know that musical beauty doesn’t just happen but requires skill, training, and practice.

While both our choirs have valued both participation and excellence, it is fair to say that our congregation has tended to identify our Alleluia Choir more strongly with the former and our St. Cecilia Choir more strongly with the latter. Our Music Discernment Team believes we are ready as a congregation to bring the gifts of both these ensembles together in our unified Parish Choir.

Some characteristics of the choral program we hope for include the following:

- The choir combines high expectations for its members with a welcoming attitude toward all who wish to join. A core of members with strong sight-reading and vocal skills will help those with less experience find their way. We were impressed by a conversation with music director George Emblom at St. Mark’s, Berkeley, who shared with us that he has just three criteria for choir members: they need to (1) be able to match pitch, (2) have a joyful and team-oriented spirit, and (3) commit to the choir’s schedule and responsibilities.
- Choir members grow in technique, musicianship, and knowledge over time as a result of singing in this ensemble. The director (and perhaps the occasional guest clinician) takes the choir in new directions, so there is a regular flow of stimulating new ideas and techniques for our musicians to explore. We might explore resources such as the Royal School of Church Music’s Voice for Life Program to support choir members’ ongoing growth.
- The director also has a joyful, but professional spirit, sees their role as a teacher and pastoral minister of music, and is willing and able to sit and listen to the



concerns of the various musicians, and to incorporate retreats, fellowship, and regular prayer into the life of the choir.

- In addition to the outstanding choral musical offerings from our choir, the congregation will be actively encouraged to participate. Congregational singing will be seen as the heart of our music-making, with the choir as servant leaders who both enable the congregation to do its best singing and also sing on the congregation's behalf.
- We will take greater advantage of the choir's leadership in parts of the service other than the offertory. Rather than seeing the choir's role as primarily to rehearse and perform an anthem, we will see the choir (and cantors from within the choir) taking leadership roles in elements like the psalm, Alleluia verses, other service music, the Prayers of the People, communion songs, etc.
- This likely will mean that our choir regularly sits in the chancel as a group throughout the service. This will have been implemented with pastoral care since many choir members have been used to coming up out of the congregation at the offertory and have valued the sense of informality and being "of the congregation" that this gives. A more informal summer choir might continue this practice so there is a balance at different times of year.
- Congregation members (including those not in the choir) will be actively and regularly encouraged to share their individual musical gifts by offering a solo, an anthem, etc. throughout the year.
- We will explore the possibility of starting additional small ensembles such as a small advanced group (a *schola cantorum*), a plainchant group, a handbell choir, etc. These ensembles might sing/play on occasional Sundays or at special services.

## V. Where We're Going: The Repertoire We Seek

In our congregational survey in May 2022, we invited our members to share their thoughts, hopes, and sense of calling for our music ministries in their own words. Themes mentioned by three or more people are listed in the appendix below. It's noteworthy that by far the two most-mentioned themes were "Love traditional music/hymns" and "Wish for more varied/diverse music." This combination seems to sum up our sense of musical calling fairly well.

At Incarnation we cherish our grounding in a historically Anglican repertoire, including organ music, hymnody in the *Hymnal 1982* tradition, and choral music by English, European, and North American composers from the Renaissance through the present day. Indeed, we want to grow and deepen our ability to do this repertoire well, including elements such as Anglican chant and plainsong. In some ways, historic Anglican repertoire has not been as deeply explored at Incarnation as one might expect. There is room for a deeper immersion in Anglican composers from William Byrd through Benjamin Britten, Samuel Sebastian Wesley through Ralph Vaughan Williams, as well as continental Renaissance and Baroque composers like Palestrina and Schütz.

At the same time, there is significant interest among many (not all) parishioners in expanding the range of our repertoire. Our members show a general interest in enhancing the "singability" of our congregational music. This might include a somewhat greater use of livelier or more rhythmic hymnody. It might include styles of music that have become common in many Episcopal congregations but aren't yet very familiar at Incarnation, including Taizé, Iona, and paperless styles. It might include more frequent use of call-and-response music between a cantor or choir and the congregation. It might include gospel, southern, and African-American styles of music as well as some music from other cultures.

It would also include intentional attention to the balance between familiar music and new music, with new service music and hymnody being introduced strategically to help the congregation sing with confidence. This might happen through periodic hymn sings or other education opportunities, through newsletter articles or posted recordings in advance, or sometimes through simply teaching a new piece before a Sunday service (as well as subtler methods like slipping a new hymn tune into a prelude or anthem before its introduction to the congregation). Members have sometimes expressed frustration at having "hard music" introduced without enough preparation—a situation partly created by our history of two separate music programs. For example, this Lent we used several plainsong *Missa Marialis*

service music settings which were familiar to former “11:15-ers” but unknown and difficult for former “9:00-ers.”

We are mindful that we are a largely (over 90%) white congregation in a region that is significantly more diverse (see census data for Santa Rosa and Sonoma County [here](#)). Broadening our musical range carries opportunities to reach out more effectively. It also carries potential pitfalls for tokenism and cultural appropriation. We seek musical leadership that can help us navigate these opportunities in ways that build relationships and respect.

From our music survey:

*“Think about various styles and genres of church music. Some of these are part of our current worship life, others aren’t. When you imagine how our music at Incarnation might look in the future, what would you hope for?” (Answers were on a 0-3 scale, with 0 being “none of this,” 1 being “a little of this,” 2 being “some of this,” and 3 being “lots of this.”)*

Hymns and choir anthems with organ or piano accompaniment—2.5

Organ and other instrumental music—2.1

Anglican chant—1.8

Plainsong/Gregorian chant—1.8

Taizé chant or similar “paperless” music that’s easy to learn by ear—1.7

Southern, gospel, and/or African-American music traditions—1.7

Folk-style hymns and choir anthems with piano or guitar accompaniment—1.7

Music from other cultures such as African, Asian, and Native American music—1.4

Music in Spanish, and/or Latin American music traditions—1.3

Praise-and-worship and/or contemporary Christian music—0.9

Jazz—0.8

## Appendix: Themes Mentioned in Our Congregational Survey

(see full results at [incarnationsantarosa.org/reflecting-on-our-congregational-music-survey/](http://incarnationsantarosa.org/reflecting-on-our-congregational-music-survey/))

Love traditional music/hymns—35	Appreciate choir coming from congregation—4
Wish for more varied/diverse music—33	Wish for congregation (not just choir) singing psalms—4
Wish for children's choir—20	Wish for more choir members—4
Love organ music—18	Wish for Evensong—4
Love music as an element of our worship—17	Wish for plainchant—4
Love the congregation's singing—17	Wish for more contemporary music—4
Appreciation for our current music staff—17	Wish for more engaging music—4
Wish for more lively music—14	Wish for gospel music—4
Wish for more use of different instruments—14	Wish to continue classical tradition—4
Love the variety of our music—13	Wish for section leaders—3
Like having one single choir—13	Wish for body movement/liturgical dance—3
Love the choir—11	Wish for deepened Anglican musical identity—3
Love openness to participation from musicians of all levels—11	Wish for musical reputation in community—3
Wish for less hard-to-sing songs—11	Wish for music theory/skills training—3
Love the excellence of our music—10	Wish for more seasonality in hymn selection—3
Wish for small ensembles alongside main choir—10	Cautious about cultural appropriation—3
Wish for concerts—9	Wish for better acoustics/acoustic study of space—3
Wish for no conflict/division—9	Wish for Appalachian/Sacred Harp music—3
Love sung liturgy/chanting—8	Wish for choir exchange—3
Wish for music that appeals to young people—8	Wish for choir in chancel—3
Wish for Taizé/paperless/contemplative music—8	
Wish for a single director/single minister of music—7	
Wish for more choral excellence—6	
Wish for more volunteers to sing/play—6	
Don't connect with traditional hymns—6	
Liked having two choirs of different levels/approaches—5	
Love enthusiasm—5	
Wish for folk music—5	
Wish for handbells—5	
Wish for musical plays—5	