

Getting to Know....Bill Shaffer

Written by Vic Gideon

"A lot of people have to go to work but I get to go to work," explains Bill Shaffer, Director of Music Ministries at Communion of Saints Parish. "I still enjoy coming here each and every time I come."

"How many people get to say I get to do God's work every day?" he rhetorically asks.

Bill Shaffer's time at Communion of Saints Parish began as a whirlwind earlier this year.

"I had an interview here with Father Anthony which lasted literally eighteen minutes," Bill remembers. "Normally, when it's that short, it's not a good sign and I walked away going, 'Boy, I blew that one.'"

But an hour later, Bill got a call from the Parish. "'Father wants to hear you play tomorrow,'" Bill recalls.

"After six minutes, he stopped me, and he's like, 'Can you come down here please?' and I'm like, 'That's it; it's over.'"

"'I need your number,' Bill remembers of Father Anthony's request. 'I want to send you an offer tomorrow.'"

That was the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday this year. Bill began on Thursday and his first six weeks at Communion of Saints included Lent, Holy Week, and Easter. But it was a job for which he had prepared his whole career.

A 1998 Baldwin Wallace graduate in Piano Performance, Bill then got a master's degree from Cleveland Institute of Music in Accompaniment (or Collaborative Piano). In 1999, he started at Old Stone Church (where he met his future wife, who joined Old Stone while she began work as the training manager at the then-recently opened House of Blues), Bill playing there until 2008. There was a detour away from music into life insurance for a year, then Westlake's Disciples of Christ, Bethany English Lutheran Church on Triskett Road in Cleveland, St. John's Cathedral, a tour with the Broadway show "Something Rotten," then St. Anthony of Padua in Lorain while working freelance at Temple Emanu El in Orange Village on Friday nights and St. Emeric on West 22nd Street on Saturdays, then onto St. Angela Merici in Fairview Park just before COVID in 2020.

"I enjoyed all the places I was at," Bill says. "Sometimes, God works in mysterious ways. I don't question when it's time to move or time to stay."

Bill's journey began in Euclid, where he was born, then a move to Mentor at age two, getting baptized at St. Bedes in Mentor. Then, Bill's parents left the Catholic Church and became Protestant. Bill graduated from Mentor Christian School but found himself going to different churches before eventually returning to the Catholic Church, receiving his First Communion and Confirmation in 2002 at the age of 23.

"I found Catholicism to fit my bill," he shares.

Bill's background in both the Catholic and Protestant religions gives him a unique perspective, able to draw from a wider range of music.

"I don't see hymns or music as one of the other as we do with our faith -- I see it as both/and," he explains about Catholic versus Protestant music and the debate over pipe organs, chanting, or contemporary instruments like guitars. "Which is correct? The answer is: all three."

"Music is universal," he says. "God created music for our edification and for our enjoyment."

Bill now lives in Seven Hills with his wife, Michelle, married in August 2005 at Calgary Presbyterian in Logansport, Indiana. Michelle now works as an Interventional Specialist at Mercer Elementary School in the Shaker School District and the couple plans to move closer to the Heights if Michelle gets tenure at Shaker Schools.

"I've always had faith and always trusted that God will provide all my needs no matter how ridiculous they might be," he says of his journey to Communion of Saints. "I get to bring people into the faith through music."

And he's grateful for the path that brought him to COS.

"I've been told, 'You're an answer to our prayers,'" he recalls parishioners saying. "The answer back is, 'St. Ann, St. Philomena, Communion of Saints is an answer to my prayers.'"

