

Spiritual Journey

Teaching at a Christian college like Roberts Wesleyan is in many ways the fulfillment of a life dream, a goal for which I've prayed since early in my career. I am grateful to be a part of a Christian learning community, yes, but most of all I am grateful for the freedom a place like Roberts affords me to acknowledge and celebrate the most important thing about me: my relationship with and faith in Jesus Christ. This relationship permeates everything I do as I seek to conform my worldview to that of Christ as revealed in his Word, but it is a profound gift to be able to speak explicitly about my faith in my daily work and professional interactions. This profound freedom manifests itself in so many facets of my responsibilities at Roberts, from classroom and rehearsal discussions to public and private prayer with students to mentoring of advisees.

My own Christian life began on the Pennsylvania dairy farm on which I was raised by two loving parents for whom God and church were central. Our family—mom, dad, younger sister, and I—could be found multiple times per week in our small, rural congregation of devoted believers. During my undergraduate and master's degrees at Houghton College, my faith became more personal and shed the (not always covert) fundamentalist undertones of my upbringing. During early adulthood and my doctoral studies in Florida, I became increasingly drawn to the historic Reformed tradition and subsequently worshipped in Presbyterian churches.

Presently, my Christian faith is nurtured at Rochester Christian Reformed Church in Penfield. I worship weekly there and serve as director of the adult choir. I participate in a church-affiliated Bible study of other intellectuals we've jokingly nicknamed the "Holy Huddle." I am engaged in spiritual direction with Rev. Anthony Selvaggio. Through these avenues and through private disciplines of prayer, Scripture reading, and occasional isolation for spiritual renewal, I

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continue to grow closer to our Lord and sense more personally his roles in my life as both Savior and Friend.

At Roberts, I consider it a blessing to empower our students to integrate their faith with learning in multiple contexts. I include prayer in all my classes from time to time. In Vocal Music Methods, we regularly discuss the Christian implications of being a professional educator when addressing issues like diversity in the classroom, leadership, and interactions with students. In Chorale, every rehearsal begins with a different spiritually oriented activity: student-led devotions on Mondays, memory work or reflection on the year's theme verses on Tuesdays, "encouragement box" on Wednesdays, and a time for sharing prayer requests on Thursdays.

Educational Philosophy

Parents are commanded to “Train up a child in the way he should go” (Proverbs 22:6), and while the role of a teacher is not that of a parent, I believe the responsibilities of college professors are just as sacred. Christian educators are called to impart to our students the knowledge they will need to contribute to their disciplines, society, and the Church. We are called to equip our students with the skills they will need to succeed in their chosen fields. We are called to encourage critical thinking and a biblical worldview. And we are called to cultivate in our students sound judgment, self-control, good character, an attitude of servanthood to others, and upright living.

In short, then, our role as Christian professors is to facilitate learning, which involves not only the acquisition of truths but applications of them in service of the Author of Truth, to His glory alone. Although God’s common grace has endowed believers and non-believers alike with unquestionable intellectual gifts, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, / and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight” (Proverbs 9:10). Therefore, true learning and the wisdom to use that learning for the best purposes is possible only when one is guided by the Holy Spirit. As Christ taught, “If you abide in My word, you are truly My disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (John 8:31–32).

As a music educator, I believe music connects us to the very qualities God implanted within us that make us human. Music education empowers people with a matchless instrument of expression, praise, and worship, endowing us with great joy and civility. I believe music is fundamental to the holistic education of every student. Therefore, I strive to nurture the whole of each student with whom I come in contact through comprehensive, edifying musical knowledge, skills, and experiences in class, performance, and rehearsal. My calling and my passion is to bestow a lifelong love of learning—musically, intellectually, emotionally, and spiritually—upon every student.

Teaching Effectiveness

Even ahead of my identity as a musician and scholar, I identify as an educator. I consider it a blessing to work at a place like Roberts that encourages me to devote most of my time and energy to my direct work with students. Allow me to reflect on the components that make for effective teaching:

- *Academic content knowledge* – Even more important than the pursuit of knowledge that characterized my entire life as a student, including the earning of a Ph.D. from the number-two-ranked school in the nation in my subdiscipline, I remain an active learner and am committed to a lifetime of learning myself. I hope this eagerness for new knowledge and better practices serves as a powerful model for my students.
- *Awareness of current disciplinary scholarship* – I remain abreast of developments in music education and choral music through the academic journals published by the National Association for Music Education (NAfME) and the American Choral Directors Association (ACDA). I attend the state-level NAfME conference and the regional or national conference of ACDA each year. I also maintain active research practices in the specific topic of my own doctoral dissertation, sight-singing pedagogy.
- *Student growth* – In each of the classes I teach at Roberts, I am pleased to witness the growth of students' knowledge and skills and their burgeoning academic curiosity in new subject areas. In the aural skills sequence, students graduate from level to level and routinely comment around exam time they could not have imagined being able to do what they are able to. In choral conducting class, students have video evidence of their conducting and rehearsing from early in the semester and reflect at the end of the semester on their improvement, many noting with satisfaction that they now feel equipped to conduct in

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professional settings. Perhaps most visibly, the quality of the Chorale from my first concert to now has risen dramatically, both in technical achievement and expressive potential.

- *Effectiveness of course design* – Since coming to Roberts, I have substantially rewritten the curricula for the Choral Conducting and Vocal Music Methods courses. Students regularly comment that, although the amount of information presented and assessment measures used can sometimes feel overwhelming, they are grateful for the rigor of such crucial coursework in their degree programs. As the conductor of the Chorale, course design's most important two factors are (a) performance schedule and (b) literature selection. I am pleased since coming to Roberts to have essentially tripled the Chorale's performance calendar, thus exposing new audiences to Roberts Wesleyan College, to have developed a variety of effective partnerships and collaborations between the Chorale and various community groups, and to have greatly increased the amount of non-Western music and music by living composers to the Chorale's repertoire.

The areas of teaching effectiveness that I most need to improve on is (a) providing meaningful and timely feedback on assessment and (b) sensitivity to student needs. On the former matter, I will admit that I have not yet found a schedule or routine that has consistently allowed me to return student work quickly and grade assignments and exams with the haste they deserve. I am actively working to set aside the time necessary to do so. Regarding the latter, I remain committed to the ideal that the best learning occurs at the line between comfort and discomfort, meaning that students learn best when they are challenged but not when they are overwhelmed. Especially in regard to the increased rigor of the Chorale outlined above, finding this balance is difficult. In large part because the ability levels present in this ensemble are so diverse—ranging from first-year non-music majors to senior-year vocal performance and choral music education majors—it is difficult to

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find the appropriate balance of both performance schedule and literature selection that meets the median student at that comfort–discomfort line while simultaneously finding differentiated instruction techniques that appropriately stimulates the advanced student and caringly nurtures the novice student. I am committed to continually evaluating my own approach and to finding ways to improve on this area of my teaching.

Scholarship

As a choral conductor, most of my creative and scholarly activity will be related to performance activities, especially guest conducting; the curriculum vitae in the Professional Activity section of my portfolio outlines my guest conducting and other scholarly engagements. I have also been an active presenter at academic conferences of the New York State School Music Association and the American Choral Directors Association. Currently, I am co-authoring a book project with Gary Stith. Our proposal, *Score and Rehearsal Preparation: A Realistic Approach for Choral Conductors*, has been accepted by Meredith Music Publications and will hopefully be published in the summer of 2020.

One of the weaknesses of my CV is that I have not published in a peer-reviewed journal. To be honest, I find it difficult to reserve the time necessary for the kind of deep research necessary to write scholarly articles of this nature. The demands of the other aspects of my work as well as my efforts to maintain healthy work–life balance encroach on the time commitment necessary for such scholarship. I welcome the input of my supervisors on this area of professional weakness.

Professional Activity and Service to College & Community

Regarding my professional activity, I actively participate in professional development opportunities provided at the College, including the faculty retreat and events sponsored by the Faculty Development Committee. I seek ways to contribute to the work of the Department of Music & Performing Arts and actively pursue collaborations with faculty and staff colleagues. I am an active member of the American Choral Directors Association and serve on the board of the 2020 Eastern Region Conference Planning Committee. I conduct the adult choir at my home church.

Perhaps my most significant professional activity is the recruiting work I do on behalf of the College. I regularly visit local high schools to observe or work with their choral ensembles. I launched the RWC Visiting Ensemble Program, during which high school choirs visit our campus for the day and I provide instruction among other activities. This summer, we are inaugurating the RWC Choir Camp, a weeklong opportunity for high school students. Next fall, we launch the RWC Invitational Choral Competition. Each spring, I conduct the RWC Honors Choir, the number of applicants for which has doubled since my first year here. I am grateful for the support the College has given me to dramatically increase our exposure to talented high school singers from across the region.