

Pathway Announces Retirement of Music Minister James Kraus

Released May 2024

Pathway Church is inviting the community to celebrate the retirement of Minister of Music James Kraus on Sunday, June 2, at noon in their fellowship hall, where they will share memories of him and honor his impact on the church and community. The Reverend James Kraus joined the staff of St. Joseph First United Methodist Church, now Pathway Church, in August 1993 as Director of Music and Leadership Development and will retire on June 30, 2024. He was ordained as a Deacon in Full Connection in 2000.

Over the years, Kraus has led the Chancel Choir, Bell Choir, Worship Band, children's and youth choirs, a women's Contemporary Vocal Ensemble, and played the organ and piano. He has written several cantatas including *Magnificat*, *Song of Mary*, *In the Beginning was the Word*, and *The Good Shepherd*.

According to Pathway Senior Pastor Dan Colthorp, "As a Music Minister, Jim has enhanced our worship experience through excellent music and has helped thousands of people draw closer to God through music. Jim has inspired many musicians to offer their gifts and talents to the Lord, seeing it as a spiritual act of worship. He also has wonderful relationships with many musicians in the area, and they come and play in an orchestra or sing at our church for worship and special Christmas and Easter services."

Former interim Pastor Terry Euper added, "Jim's ability to bring in the community and make their musical gifts a part of the church's ministry was amazing. He was a master at blending the talents of so many people."

"Jim Kraus is definitely a mover and shaker in the St. Joseph/ Benton Harbor music scene," said local musician Gary Cooper, "He has impacted the church and area musicians in the best positive way. I will miss Jim's attention to detail and how he always knows the story behind each piece he does."

Former Senior Pastor Wade Panse, who worked with Kraus for 17 years, remarked that Jim has the patience and perseverance to work with aspiring young musicians. He often accompanied them in various recitals and competitions, including them in worship and musical performances. In addition, "Professionals recognized Jim's gifts as a conductor, arranger, composer, and performer and were eager to join him," said Panse.

Local harpist Meg Rodgers shared that she has enjoyed working with Kraus on compositions he received commissions for. Rodgers said, “Jim premiered a piece with the Cypress Ridge (TX) High School Symphony for their performance at the Midwest Clinic in Chicago. He was able to clinic the students at a performance at The Howard at Andrews and then observe the group in Chicago. It was wonderful watching the kids interact with a live composer.”

As part of Kraus' outreach to the community, the church has hosted musicals: *Godspell* in 2009, *Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat* in 2011, and *A Christmas Carol* in 2015 and 2018. Kraus tapped Jay Donley, who grew up in St. Joseph and now performs in Chicago, to direct the musicals. "I've been fortunate to know Jim as far back as I can remember my time at St. Joseph First UMC. His children's choir was a wonderful introduction to music, as well as the stage," said Donley, "His plays and special programs have a direct link to my career in the arts now, and I could not be more thankful for the opportunities he created for me. Jim is an incredibly talented musician, director, and minister."

Kraus and a fellow Music Minister, David Carew, formed the Southwest Michigan Chorale by combining the Pathway church choir with Southwest Michigan College vocal students and other local singers. This group has made several ambassador trips, beginning in 2017 to Ireland, that included a recital at St. Patrick's Cathedral. In 2019, they went to Austria, Hungary, and the Czech Republic, and gave a concert at a homeless shelter and a recital at the Haydnssaal concert hall in Esterhazy Palace. The group went to Italy in 2022 and was the choir for mass at St. Peter's Basilica, singing an anthem titled *Breathe on Me Breath of God* written by Kraus. They will travel to France this summer and sing Duruflé's *Requiem* with other choirs at La Madeleine in Paris.

Former Senior Pastor Harris Hoekwater reflected on Kraus' musical career in the church and community. "I have to say that in the years I worked with Jim, I was in constant awe of his level of genius and giftedness as a musician. I was completely baffled at his ability to turn out endless orchestrations for more holidays and events than I could possibly keep count of. He was an absolute maestro on the keyboard, and the congregation was beyond blessed to be on the receiving end of his gifts for all these years. But Jim went so far beyond just the walls of the church. His love of God and music and others took him far and wide, but especially across the community and the region. He reached out to people in all the schools, colleges, and universities, and shared his love of music and the Gospel. While an era is coming to an end, I am sure his influence will live on in the life of the congregation and community."

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