

ASPIRING TO THE IDEALS OF PAUL LINDSLEY THOMAS

The words of Dr. Thomas:

“When we offer anything to God, it needs to be the best of which we are capable. As much as possible we must pursue excellence. I do not see any reason why church music should not exhibit the same excellence that one experiences in the finest concert halls. Of course, thorough training of the church musician is required and resources in churches vary. The point is that we offer the best that we have.”

“With all my adult and children’s choirs, I would always remind them that we offer God not just our money but our time and talent to the best of our capability. I promoted these ideas, and the people responded. The result was incredibly beautiful, even though the musicians were volunteers. The product was always greater than the sum of its parts because the inspiration of the moment took over.”

“It was often that I got goose-bumps as I directed. Individual musicians with varying levels of expertise out-performed their supposed capabilities. That was the Holy Spirit at work – the ‘X-factor.’”

“All of these factors came together to provide music equal to or in some cases surpassing what one might experience in a concert hall. The offering of this music nourished the spiritual growth, prayer and praise of the Christian congregations who experienced it.”

Characteristics/beliefs of Dr. Thomas from those who knew and worked with him:

- Always place a sense of ministry first. He was not career-driven, wanting a program that competed with others. Performance was less important than offering music of excellence for worship.
- His ego was never forefront. His pastoral skills were.
- He sought wisdom from and relationships with people who shared goals of excellent music for worship, and who always thought about music as part of their deep commitment to service.
- He believed we must watch for the Holy Spirit at work to create a sum greater than the parts.
- “When we sing, we pray twice” was his motto.
- Our goal is not only to sing and play well but always to worship God.
- A disciplined life begins early. We must teach children to sing!
- In all we do, we seek to communicate a spiritual experience through music to the congregation.
- A strong relationship between clergy and musician is key to transcendent worship.
- Cross-fertilization of ideas and practices beyond denominational barriers is to be sought.
- Stay in one place. The maximum benefit to the congregation is a consistent music program.
- “We remember longer what we sing than words we hear or speak.”
- Stick to the basics. When you do, the rest can happen.