Go Where the Spirit Sends You

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After four years as Director of Music and Liturgy at Georgetown University where he successfully revived the Chapel Choir, leading the group to performances in Rome this past spring, music school graduate Russell Weismann is now directing and performing music in the world’s eighth largest church.

Somewhat intimidated by the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, DC – the patronal Catholic Church of America – Weismann said he considered the opportunity carefully before accepting.

“In the end, I owe it to the Spiritans at Duquesne who taught me to go where the Spirit sends you,” he said. “Working at the Basilica is a privilege that I was honored to accept. My music reaches thousands of people every week and I am able to use my gifts as a musician to their fullest potential.”

Weismann attended graduate school at Yale, where he worked for the University Chaplain’s Office as the Chapel Organist. That experience, he said, sparked an interest in campus ministry work.

“At Georgetown, I started with a choir of seven singers, and through a lot of hard work and determination, that group grew to over 40 members in just four years.”

Last May, Weismann took 37 singers from Georgetown University's Chapel Choir to Italy on a choral pilgrimage. In addition to sight-seeing, they sang for Mass in St. Peter's Basilica, St. Francis Basilica in Assisi, St. Lorenzo Basilica in Florence and the Church of the Gesù in Rome.

“We also had the pleasure of singing for Pope Benedict XVI in St. Peter’s Square during his weekly audience,” Weismann said. “My students and I will never forget the many memorable experiences that trip gave us.”

Weismann also said he will never forget the education and training he received as an undergraduate student at Duquesne.

“What I loved most about Duquesne was that it offered me a well-rounded education in the context of the Catholic Spiritan tradition. I had the opportunity to meet friends from all over campus and to benefit from establishing friendships with my peers in other schools.”

Weismann recalled how the Spiritan priests were involved in the university community and always looked forward to Monday Noon organ mass in the chapel with the late Fr. Francis X. Hanley.

Noting professors including Dr. Ann Labounsky, his organ instructor, Dr. Jessica Wiskus and Dr. David Cutler, his musicianship teachers, Weismann said he is grateful for the knowledge and mentorship they shared.

“The excitement that they manifested in their work was tremendous and undoubtedly sparked my desire to continue on with a career in music,” he said.

Calling it his “passion and ministry,” Weismann said Sacred Music is able to reach people in a way that other types of music cannot.

“I am always sensitive to the music that I select and prepare for liturgies, hoping that it will inspire God’s presence in people’s hearts and enable them to lift their voices in prayer. I am tremendously grateful to everyone who helped me get to where I am, and I look forward to where the Spirit leads me next.”