



**‘A church with a marching band?
Whoever heard of such a thing?’**

Not Quite 76 Trombones

By Tim Clark

The scene is a small-town parade on a late summer evening. From a distance we hear a familiar sound, the rhythmic cadence of an approaching marching band. But this is no ordinary band. Its members are not from the ranks of the local high school, but from the church on the edge of town!

“A church with a marching band? Who ever heard of such a thing!” That’s the usual reaction from those who learn about Emmanuel Christian Church’s “Blood Washed Band.” They may know about Salvation Army bands, and they might remember the “players on instruments” who honored God in ancient history (Psalm 68:24, 25). Yet in today’s high-tech environment of computerized worship services and electronic

music, it takes a lot of courage to revive the decidedly low-tech approach of a good, old-fashioned marching band playing good, old-fashioned hymns—and take the whole idea to the streets of one’s local community!

A Call to Action

That idea originated in one of Emmanuel Christian Church’s own members, a mother of adult children, a musician, and a one-time high school music educator. She saw it as nothing short of a personal call to action from God himself! The elders of our church, and then the entire congregation, soon caught her vision.

Initially, the challenge was to assemble a marching band (along with a marching choir) to participate in

the sesquicentennial celebration of the local town’s founding. When the day for the much-anticipated festivities finally arrived, more than 120 of the congregation’s members showed up to either play in the band, sing in the choir, or ride on the float accompanying the marchers. Three years, and nearly a dozen performances later, the band has grown at times to include everything from Boy Scout color guards and VBS cartoon characters to its own motorcycle and antique car escorts. It has nearly become a self-contained “instant” parade.

A Congregation at the Ready

Emmanuel is not a megachurch located near some thriving metropolitan area. It’s a congregation of



Emmanuel Christian Church’s band marches during the Grand Cavalcade Parade at the 2002 Great Stoneboro (Pennsylvania) Fair.



Ray “Mac” McAllister paces while the band lines up in front of the grandstand at the Great Stoneboro Fair. McAllister is a former high school band director who serves as an adviser to Cheryl Drew, the church’s band director.

about 300 located in a western Pennsylvania county that is best described as rural-agrarian. It’s a congregation of newborns through golden-agers who have been personally challenged to discover and use their gifts for ministry. As a result, when presented with a challenge to represent Christ to their community, nearly everyone wanted to get involved!

While many participate directly in the band, many others lend support by repairing equipment, providing food (like an army, this band travels on its stomach), and helping with thousands of details that such an effort requires. The band crosses lines of age as well as spiritual giftedness within the congregation. It bears witness to Christ in new community venues and also strengthens our church.

A Community Reached

The reception of the Blood Washed Band by the community has been interesting, to say the least. Christians respond with exuberant smiles and applause, while others bear a thunderstruck ex-

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pression that clearly displays the death of their stereotypic concepts of how Christians look and what Christians do.

The band’s public witness takes place not only during its performances, but also as members assem-

ble before and after each event. During those times, the power of Christ to assemble a family from many families can be seen in the expressions of Christian fellowship and the atmosphere of fun that prevails.

After a recent performance at the county fair, one woman spoke of how the sight of a group ranging from babes in arms to the very old, all participating in a witness for Christ, brought tears to her eyes.

Band members have heard comments such as, “You must have to play an instrument to be a part of that church!” (which isn’t true) and, “I think that must be *some* kind of church!” (which *is* true).

None of Emmanuel’s members believes the band is the ultimate tool for evangelizing the lost, but all can tell you how the band has served to spark conversations about the Lord’s love with people of all different backgrounds. They can tell you how their lives have been blessed and how their mission field has expanded to include folks they might never have reached before.

Emmanuel Christian Church, located in Stoneboro, Pennsylvania, is a “new” church work with a long history. It was formed on August 6, 1995, by the joining of two sister congregations (The Carpenter’s Corners Church of Christ and the Sandy Lake Church of Christ), giving the congregation a combined history of more than 200 years. Learn more about Emmanuel’s fellowship at www.emmanuelchristian.com.

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