

Our Lady of Fatima music director is in tune with parishioners

When Brian Whaley, his three siblings and his parents sing happy birthday, they belt it out beautifully in five-part harmony. As singers and musicians, the Whaleys frequently break out into song - "Amazing Grace" is their favorite - when their family joins together.

"My mom taught me how to sing harmony at age 5," said Mr. Whaley, 50, a Loyola College of Maryland, Baltimore, graduate. "Our entire family is musical. We've been in and out of bands growing up."

No surprise then, that Mr. Whaley's four part-time jobs are music-related. For more than 20 years, he has served as music director of Our Lady of Fatima, Baltimore, overseeing an adult choir, a handbell choir (in which his wife, Susan, plays), and a children's choir.

He tunes and repairs pianos as a technician for his company, Absolute Piano Tuning and Repair. A third job is as music teacher at Regional Institute for Children and Adolescents, a state facility in Catonsville where he works twice a week with emotionally disturbed teens.

"It's a good outlet for them," he said, "and some are very talented." Lastly, Mr. Whaley owns a recording studio where he records music he composes and produces projects for local musicians.

Every other Friday morning he is busily plucking religious songs on his guitar at Our Lady of Fatima in what is basically a big sing-along in the church, he said. "It gets a little rowdy. They love it."

And if he can find a minute in between four jobs and parenting four children ages 26, 24, 22 and 5, Mr. Whaley, a Towson resident and Our Lady of Fatima parishioner, plays the violin, guitar, piano and bass. He is credited with producing an album and a CD, and he has a third one in the works.

“Depends on the day and how well-behaved the kids are,” he said about which job is his favorite. “Tuning pianos I’m by myself and sometimes that’s nice. Dealing with the emotionally disturbed kids – I couldn’t do that five days a week.”

He considered becoming a priest, joining the seminary after high school for three years. “That was my intention,” he said. “I think I would have made a good priest.”

Yet in the alternate direction his destiny has turned, Brian Whaley’s life seems to be synchronized – just what a musician needs.