

ALL MY TRIALS

When I first began directing choral groups, on the college level, then at churches and in schools, it was not something that was commonly done by women. There were few who did it in my religious and Christian school environment because it was looked upon as being a role that allowed women to “lead men”, something that was prohibited through their scriptural teachings. However, through persistence and skill I was able to be appointed to teaching positions that permitted me to do what I loved and wanted to do – teach and direct music.

In the early eighties, I had been asked to begin a music program for a Christian academy in Michigan and to form a chorus which would be used for recruitment and fundraising. This chorus, made up of children in grades 7 through 12, sang in churches throughout the metropolitan Detroit area, primarily on Sunday afternoons and evenings. And although each church was informed by the school’s director that the chorus had a female director, there were often still challenges to my doing so when I would arrive at the various locations for us to sing.

Often these challenges would be requests by the men at the churches for me to make “concessions” that would make my presence more palatable to them. More often than not, they would not pray before I brought the choir in, so that it would not appear that we were actually in a worship setting. But the usual compromise was that I would be allowed to direct but not to speak, requiring that I would choose a young boy to announce the songs and to give whatever introductions were needed for the music we would sing.

I became demoralized by this after time and it reached a peak at a Sunday afternoon concert, when told right before going up to direct that in addition to not speaking, I was to keep my back to the audience at all times, never turning to look at or to acknowledge them. It happened to be Mother’s Day and the choir would present me with a gift, but I was only permitted to smile and mouth my appreciation to them in silence but not to be heard. They seemed disappointed and confused by my response.

I don’t know why this hurt more than other times or it just became the heaviest straw after years of similar treatment. But it brought the typical response that I had to heaviness – prayer and writing. As I waited on a parent to pick up the last child from the church, I walked to and fro shaking my head saying “I’m going to take this to God when I get home”. I went home that night and wrote “All My Trials”. Within days I taught it to my young choir and it was well received, despite the fact that the children singing it had very few trials and burdens and no one knew what had inspired its writing.

In the beginning it only had the first two verses, but when I saw the kind of response it received, especially from older women, I decided to add a third verse a year later in tribute to them.