Celebration: Worship With Its Hair Down, Hands Up

By Paul Yoder
Staff Writer

Martin Chapel is alive on Sunday evening. Students stream into the Seminary building for a time of worship. A time of Celebration.

“I come because it’s time out; it’s time with God; and it’s fellowship with people,” said junior Heidi Bowman. “When I come, lots of things happen. I’m renewed. It’s good to give to God. And I can make connections with other people doing the same thing.”

“I really enjoy the up-beat music,” said first-year Holden Byler. A sense of worship is evident “from the atmosphere” he continued, adding that his favorite reason for frequenting Celebration is seeing drummer Jermaine Wyche.

Sophomore Eric Blinder also commented on the praise environment. “At church it seems very formal,” he said. “This is just a place people can come together to worship.”

Celebration even attracts a number of JMU students and community youth.

“I’ve found that I like it compared to the praise services at JMU because it’s set up so that it is very worshipful—it’s not just singing through the song and going on to the next song,” said JMU sophomore Allison Fletcher. “Quality of music is really good too.”

Celebration is about worship, whether through song, prayer, or sharing.

“We remind ourselves that this is not a show, it’s totally for the Lord,” said sophomore Jesse Rodriguez, a member of the Celebration leadership team. “We want to give it up to the Lord. We’re just instruments that He plays through.”

Rodriguez is one of a number of guitarists who help provide the music for songs. He said that he enjoys using his background in playing in church and at Highland Retreat summer camps.

The Celebration team meets on Thursday evenings to prepare for the following Sunday. “On Thursday nights we just come and worship together,” said Rodriguez.

An individual leader then prepares the order of music and decides what type of sharing or Scripture reading will be incorporated into the service.

The Celebration crew has official club status. The Campus Pastors sponsor as official faculty sponsors. “Byron [Peachey] talked to me about being coordinators,” said Leaman.

She said that while she doesn’t know when Celebration officially began, she has written materials concerning mission and suggestions dated 1996. “Celebration isn’t supposed to be a replacement for church,” Leaman said. “Celebration is just a student-led worship service.”

As coordinator Leaman oversees the team’s organization. Her responsibilities include talking to the leader each week, keeping the team in contact with each other and making sure the overarching place is in place. The position “means I get to hold five keys,” she said with a smile.

“It’s really really awe-inspiring when I see people who attend setting up chairs afterward—just pitching in,” added Leaman.

The Celebration leadership team is made up of Leaman, Rodriguez, Eve Aeschliman, Jen Varner, Peter Sensenig, Wyche, and Matt Terry.