

Submitted to the Woonsocket Call on 3/28/2008

In Defense of Music Education



The great novelist Fyodor Dostoyevsky famously wrote that “beauty will save the world”. While this conviction summarized an essential truth of his Orthodox faith, one need not be Orthodox – or even Christian – to recognize its truth. Music and the visual arts are both a demonstration of civilization and a means of elevating us to it. Among other things, music teaches harmony, precision, discipline, and community. Its practitioners learn how working (and playing) together in concert creates something greater than themselves, something positive that they and all within earshot can appreciate and enjoy. Musicians learn how practice leads to constant improvement and how an individual’s failure to prepare reduces everyone’s enjoyment, not just their own. Music teaches that submission to the fundamental truths of pitch, rhythm, and harmony free your spirit to express itself fully, and how listening to those around you improves your own performance and happiness. These are vital lessons for all of us, and especially for children and young adults: they are both most susceptible to and most in need of music’s civilizing influence.

Music also brings more immediate benefits. Research conclusively demonstrates that students who study music perform better in other areas than their peers, in part because music activates and challenges so many areas of the brain (logical, creative, etc.). The value of music education is recognized across the political spectrum. As a citizen, I understand that funding in these difficult times is zero-sum, and that continued funding for education means that cuts must be made elsewhere (be it in other programs or from our wallets via increased taxes). But also as a citizen, I recognize how challenging life is for school-age Americans, and how much benefit music would bring to them and our collective prosperity. My son is a choral and band musician at Woonsocket Middle School. If music education is cut in our public schools, our family will be able to continue our son’s musical development through Church choir, private lessons, and choral guilds. He will continue to accrue the benefits that music provides. But what of the less advantaged youth in our community? And what of the public good that accrues to all of us in this community from having a well-educated and civilized citizenry? These are losses that we will endure to our shame and lasting regret. Beauty will indeed save the world, but only if we share it.

Please support music education in our public schools.

Fr. Anthony Perkins
St. Michael Ukrainian Orthodox Church
Woonsocket, RI