In an open church with high ceilings, well-worn, carpeted pews, and a runner carpet down the center, the pure sound of voices rings out, seemingly from above. The Bible Baptist Church of Grand Forks has an exceptional music tradition which adds to the wonderful music culture of Grand Forks.

Until 1978, the Grand Forks Bible Baptist Church functioned like many other Baptist Churches. Church would consist of a welcoming hymn and prayer, and then hymns and a sermon, and be followed by Sunday dinner, just as in many other Bible Baptist churches.

Today, however, the church is alive with music. The music program at the Bible Baptist Church is exceptional. It includes an adult choir, a teen choir, and a wind ensemble which perform throughout the year during church services and also at other venues.

In 1978, a teen class was introduced to the Church. As a special project one year, the class prepared a choral piece written by Sheila Nelson. The congregation and the choir loved doing this so much that they began a permanent teen choir.

With the addition of the teen choir, a renewed focus on music began. An adult choir was then also formed. Sheila Nelson began accompanying the group.

There was not a wealth of sacred music at that time. To address this lack, Sheila started arranging solos for her children to assure that they were able to play sacred instrumental solos. Sheila made sure that music was continuing and growing at the church.

In 1984, at a New Years’ Eve service for the church, a special concert was presented by the young children. The concert was well received by all. The children wanted to continue, and prepare concerts year-round, not merely on New Years Eve.

In 1985, Sheila began arranging more music for children. She had noticed that
in most children’s choirs, there was a large number of young girls in the choir, but that the number of young boys was usually under five. She attributed this to the lack of music being written for this unique age group. Therefore, in an effort to encourage music in the church, she began arranging music for the youth choir.

Sheila’s impact on the music of the Grand Forks Bible Baptist Church has been phenomenal, yet she is continually humble about it. As she states, “The Lord has continually blessed our church with the gift of music, and it is merely up to us to let it continue.”

Today, children can audition for the Wind Ensemble in fifth grade, after showing a level of proficiency on their instrument. Children look up to the older members of the Wind Ensemble, which has kept the level of interest high. Recently, in conjunction with the Pastor and Musical Director, new music in being written. This is exciting for the Church, as words and music are being prepared and presented solely from within the Church.

As you can see from this interview, the musical level in the Bible Baptist Church of Grand Forks is outstanding. Sheila Nelson and the rest of the congregation are making their niche in the musical culture of Grand Forks, and especially in the Religious music of the area.