



by Lisa M. Hendeby

## CHRIST MUSIC KIDS

# Fueling a passion for God

**N**atalie Burt is a woman with a mission: she is the dynamic force behind the Christ Music Kids apostolate. Burt hopes more than anything else to draw

children into a loving relationship with God and she sees music as the perfect avenue towards meeting that goal. With the release of their second CD, *Friend of God*, Natalie Burt and Christ Music Kids give solid evidence that they're here to stay.

The Christ Music Kids ministry (formally called Catholic Kids Worship) had its seminal moments in Steubenville when founder Natalie Burt spent her college years doing music ministry at Franciscan University. Upon graduating from Franciscan University, Natalie and her family settled in the Indianapolis area where she accepted a position as Director of Youth and Family Ministries at St. John's United Church of Christ.



While she continued her active practice of Catholicism at her own parish, her ministry at St. John's exposed her to the joy of working with all ages, from infants to adults.

"God seems to continually put me in both Catholic and Protestant ministry settings," shares Burt. As part of her work at St. John's, Natalie grew to love the annual Vacation Bible School ministry. Moving beyond the pre-packaged VBS kits, she was eager to help her congregation move beyond the "cute" songs and into true worship.

"I began having a desire to use the music time as an

opportunity to bring the kids into a worship experience of God instead of merely a time to sing fun kids' songs. I was amazed at how easily the kids and volunteers entered into worship. The music set the tone for the entire VBS.

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# Christ Music Kids

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I realized that kids CAN worship, but need to worship differently than adults. Kids need movement in their worship. Adults can be very inhibited to raise their hands when singing, thinking that it draws attention to themselves. Kids need the movement. It keeps them engaged. It helps to keep them focused. More and more, God developed a passion in me to promote worship with kids.”

In 2002, Natalie reconnected with Catholic musician Martin Doman, a college friend and fellow music minister from Franciscan University. Doman shared with Natalie his vision for Christ Music, a mission devoted to renewing the heart of the Church through Eucharistic praise and worship. Having already felt stirrings in her heart to delve deeper into worship music, she revealed, “After speaking with Martin, I truly felt God calling me to be behind him in the ministry of Christ Music.”

Natalie further pursued her calling by volunteering to work with her parish’s Vacation Bible School program, leading worship with the kids. “Leading the worship during VBS that summer was amazing – I couldn’t imagine it getting any better,” she relates.

Following that summer’s Vacation Bible School, Natalie was approached by a parishioner who encouraged her to record a kids worship CD with his financial backing. Although she declined his offer of support, she ultimately connected with Mike Ofca of Innovations Studios who helped realize the dream of producing a CD for children’s worship. In 2005, Catholic Kids Worship released their first CD entitled *Your Grace is Enough* which featured twelve songs and an accompanying music video. The video was produced by Eric Pensenstadler through his Video Horizons company and features the kids and their title track “Your Grace is Enough.”

*Your Grace is Enough* featured “tweens” ages nine through fourteen with half of the songs being led by adults and the other half being led by the kids themselves. Natalie calls that freshman recording effort “a huge learning experience for me – full of ups and downs.” Distributed online, in bookstores and through Heartbeat Records, Catholic Kids Worship’s first CD has sold over 2,400 copies to date.

For Natalie, the goal of *Your Grace is Enough* was to provide energy driven music that would appeal to the

whole family. Following on the heels of her success with that project, she turned her efforts toward creating a CD of music for use in kids’ adoration. Owing in part to tremendous support from a local non-denominational church and its children’s pastor, Kathy Baden, she changed her group’s moniker to Christ Music Kids and set about raising funds to record a follow-up project.

“Even though I am Catholic,” shares Natalie, “Kathy has been unwavering in her support and has even helped me coordinate the worship for children’s adoration at the Diocesan Eucharistic Congress. The music minister from this church helped me with the auditions and practices, and ended up singing on ‘Behold the Lamb.’ Because of the growing desire from myself and some of the members



Natalie Burt, founder of Christ Music Kids, relaxes with her own children.

of this non-denominational church to work together in promoting worship with kids, I felt that I needed a more ecumenical name, even though I still choose songs that will target a Catholic audience.”

*Friend of God* consists of ten songs aimed at providing appropriate music for kids’ adoration. In her work in children’s music ministry, Natalie prefers to use pre-recorded songs in worship adoration, and encourages the kids to engage them-

selves in the worship through singing and hand motions. She set out to create a “set list” that would work in adoration settings. The CD includes the kids’ take on the Latin classic “Tantum Ergo” and Matt Maher’s contemporary version of this beautiful hymn called “Adoration.” The result, entitled “Tantum Ergo/Adoration” is a highlight and is reflective of Natalie’s goals for the project.

While accompanied on several of the tracks by adults, the true “stars” of Christ Music Kids are the kids. Last spring, Natalie held auditions with children from all areas of Charlotte and the northern section of South Carolina. Of those who auditioned, twelve were selected. The kids set to work, practicing twice weekly for six weeks and recording the CD in May. While the entire group has yet to perform live together, several of the girls have joined Paul Burt’s Life Teen XLT sessions and at this year’s Eucharistic Congress in Charlotte.

Also featured on *Friend of God* are talented musicians such as Monica Valenti, Bob Rice, Martin Doman, Paul Burt,

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# Christ Kids Music

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Sarah Hart and Brian Keith who blend their incredible talents with the kids' infectious voices to achieve great results.

To accomplish the production and release of this second CD, Natalie Burt and her non-profit corporation have been in fundraising mode. At this point, approximately two-thirds of each CD's \$15,000 project budget is funded through donations. For *Friend of God* donors were invited to submit photos for a beautiful mosaic that graces the CD's liner notes. The adorable faces of a cavalcade of children surround a photo of a monstrance, with the children adding their conclusion to the phrase "Jesus, you are..." Responses to the phrase include:

- "my best friend"
- "the coolest"
- "the one who rocks my world"
- "a beautiful inspiration"

A look at the collage and these many faith-filled depictions of Jesus underscore the tremendous need for the work that Natalie Burt and Christ Music Kids are doing. Natalie, a "stay at home" mom of three, has goals for the future of this ministry and continues to pray for God's guidance and additional support on her "team." She would like to see Christ Music Kids grow into an ecumenical resource that will support both Catholic and Protestant churches.

One recent success story is the launch of the new Christ Music Kids website located at [christmusickids.com](http://christmusickids.com). Along with features on the group and their music, the new web site offers great resources for leading worship with kids. Training materials on the site include:

- Engaging kids in worship
- Worship flow
- Song selection
- Motions
- Training up young worship leaders
- The worship space
- Adoration for kids

This past summer featured the debut of the Christ Music Kids' Vacation Bible School entitled "Bubble Blast!". The "Bubble Blast!" curriculum has been called "upbeat, rockin' and engaging". Following an additional trial run during the upcoming summer, Natalie hopes to publish the curriculum for use by other parishes in the Fall of 2008.

On the promotion front, Natalie is marketing bulk orders of *Friend of God* to parishes, churches, schools and dioceses at a discounted rate. Recently the Diocese of Phoenix purchased the CD in bulk. In addition, the Charlotte Diocesan Eucharistic Congress purchased 250 copies of *Friend of God* to be included in family bags for the event.

Natalie is already at work planning the third and fourth CDs for Christ Music Kids, which will continue to be focused upon worship songs for kids' adoration. She hopes to include versions of such time-honored hymns as "Holy God We Praise Thy Name," "O Come Let Us Adore Him" and "We Fall Down."

As Christ Music Kids continues to grow and flourish, Natalie recognizes the need to bring additional talents and skills to her team. She is seeking someone to head up marketing and advertising efforts. Additionally, Burt would love to respond to the many requests she has received to provide Spanish versions of the Christ Music Kids projects.

"We as a church need to devote more time and energy in developing a passion for God in our children," she comments. "It grieves me to hear kids say that 'church is boring, mass is boring, faith formation is boring.' Just this past weekend, I had the opportunity to lead the worship for the kids' adoration at the Charlotte Diocesan Eucharistic Congress. My daughter shared with me just last night, 'Mom, I almost started to cry during Adoration. Jesus was there with me and I felt so close to him by singing the songs and doing the motions.' THIS is what it is ALL about - bringing our children into the presence of God in a WAY that engages them and stirs their hearts. Both of my kids were literally glowing after the Congress. Children have energy. Let us harness their energy and direct it towards loving and worshiping our God!"

With committed and creative forces such as Natalie Burt and Christ Music Kids leading the way, our children are poised to embrace worship and adoration in a powerful way.

For additional information on *Friend of God*, Christ Music Kids and Natalie Burt, visit [christmusickids.com](http://christmusickids.com). †



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