

From the Director of Music Emeritus, Dr. James Cochran

I have always believed in God's plan for my life, and He has been so good to me. I have been blessed with work that is my passion, and wonderful people to help me realize that passion. Now, I am thrilled with God's plan for my successor here at Vanderbilt. Two years ago, a brilliant young organist won the Cochran Prize in Organ Performance at the Eastman School of Music, my beloved alma mater. As part of the prize, the winner comes to Naples to play for you, the generous congregation that funded both this prize and a scholarship in my name at the Eastman School. His name is Augustine Sobeng. I usually take the visiting prize winners on a tour of Naples. Augustine was enchanted by our beautiful slice of Paradise and said, "Oh Jim, you are so lucky to have lived here for so long. Please let me know if any church positions become available here because I would like to live here." And then, I heard him play one of the best recitals I have ever heard. In the middle of the concert, I had one of those moments when you know God is tapping you on the shoulder. I had been agonizing about my Parkinson's disease and wondering how long I could go on. After the goose bumps settled, I thought, "This is our next Director of Music!" Not only is Augustine one of the finest young organists in the country, he is also one of the warmest, gentlest "People Persons" I have ever met. On first meeting, it felt like we were old friends. When I found out that he applied for the job, I KNEW that God was moving in a mysterious way, His wonders to perform.

Now, a new chapter in Vanderbilt Presbyterian church begins. Please embrace Augustine and give him the support you have given me. I am now at peace with leaving my beloved church and church family, knowing that you are in the most capable AND LOVING hands. I will look forward to attending services here and seeing you all in the pews, with Augustine leading us to God through his musical gifts.

*"Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly
as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom
through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit,
singing to God with gratitude in your hearts."*

~ Colossians 3:16

Welcome our Director of Music and Organist Augustine Sobeng



1225 Piper Blvd, Naples, FL 34110
239-597-5410
www.vpcnaples.org

From the Director of Music Search Team and the Session

The Director of Music Search Team and the Session are thrilled to announce that Augustine Sobeng has accepted the offer to become the Director of Music and Organist at Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church.

After a faithful and thorough process of reviewing over 20 candidates, the Team unanimously concluded that God has led Augustine Sobeng to serve our congregation as it's Director of Music and Organist. After presenting him to the Session, they unanimously voted to offer Mr. Sobeng the pivotal job at VPC. Augustine is in the final stages of completing his D.M.A. degree at the Eastman School of Music and will be starting his new job at the end of September. We are confident that his talent, experience, and genial spirit will continue the legacy of excellent music at Vanderbilt.

From the Director of Music and Organist, Augustine Sobeng



I am overjoyed to begin my work as the Director of Music and Organist at Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church. In these twilight months of my Doctor of Musical Arts in Organ Performance, my terminal degree at the Eastman School of Music, I am looking forward to opening a new chapter and witnessing the ways in which my path as a professional musician will reveal itself.

As my faith journey is so deeply intertwined with my professional aspirations in the realm of Sacred Music, and having had the good fortune to visit Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church in 2025, I immediately recognized a rare personal resonance within your spiritual and artistic community. My musical tastes and experience were first molded in Ghana, my homeland. From the rich tapestry of music idioms practiced there - traditional and foreign alike - to the multicultural perspective gained from my extensive travels around Africa and beyond, I have observed music flourish as a unifying communal experience in many cultural contexts. When I first visited Benin and Nigeria and experienced their local worship traditions, so very different from the customs of the Methodist Church of Ghana in which I was raised, I was compelled by the power of their shared investment in the perpetuation of traditional African sacred music. In a similar vein, but through

different means, what has so deeply moved me in my experience of liturgy in Europe and America is the pursuit of refinement and spiritual inwardness, so perfectly exemplified by the treasury of the Anglo-American choral heritage. For me, and for so many, *music* – in these multifarious forms – is the vessel by which we come closest to experiencing God – through its transcendent beauty, the valuable sense of community it fosters, and the generosity of spirit it engenders. Such a pursuit of *beauty*, activated by the spirit of community, transcends national borders and confessional boundaries.

I am truly excited to begin contributing to the rich spiritual and artistic life of Vanderbilt Presbyterian Church!

EDUCATION

- University of Rochester, Rochester, NY
Doctor of Musical Arts in Organ Performance—Degree, December 2026
- Syracuse University, Syracuse, NY
Master of Music in Organ Performance—May 2021
- Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology, Accra, Ghana
Bachelor of Science in Medical Laboratory Technology—May 2014

AWARDS AND HONORS

- AGO (American Guild of Organists) Salisbury Scholarship, 2024-25
- James B. Cochran Award for outstanding DMA recital, 2024
- Received the 2024-2025 Salisbury Scholarship
- Named to *The Diapason's* 2021 class of 20 under 30, March 2021
- Syracuse University VPA Fellowship, August 2019
- Awarded Ghana's "Keyboardist of the Year" 2018 Ghana Youth Choir Festival and Awards

WORK EXPERIENCE

- St. Paul's Episcopal Church, Rochester—Organ Scholar, Assistant Director 2022-present
- University of Rochester, Eastman School of Music—Eastman Organ Department Community Concert Series—Coordinator 2023-present
- Eastman School of Music—Graduate Assistant 2025-present
- Eastman Summer Organ Academy—Coordinator 2026
- Syracuse University—accompanist, teacher and sabbatical replacement 2020