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Gospel beliefs fuel Christian musician

By Michael Jacobson

During a concert a couple years ago, Donna Toney, the director at the Paynesville Community Service Center, approached Mitch McVicker about doing a benefit concert for the food shelf in Paynesville. Her request made him take a hard look at his beliefs and his mission. He felt that saying "no" would make all the Christian beliefs that he sings about into "a big lie."

Helping the hungry is a central message of Jesus' teachings in the Bible, he says. "It's helping those who need help. It's healing those that need healing," he explained.

"This is my way to do a little part to feed the hungry," the Kansas native added on Thursday afternoon, before performing his third benefit concert in Paynesville for the food shelf in three years.



"And there's a lot of physical hunger out there, and there's a lot of spiritual hunger out there, too," he continued. Which is the message he's trying to get across with his music. "I feel it's very important that the world hears the message of the Gospel," he said.

But he feels he is merely God's instrument, and the fact that he spreads the word of God doesn't mean he is without faults. "I'm probably more screwed up than most people, but I'm happy to point the way to Jesus," he said.

"I think he's just got a really big heart," said Toney about McVicker's willingness to come and help the food shelf.

"He doesn't have to do it," she added. "Don't think that I haven't thought about why he does."

McVicker grew up in Topeka, Kan., playing the piano and guitar and singing in church and talent shows. He never treated it as more than a hobby until he met well-known artist Rich Mullen at Friends University in Wichita. "Once I met Rich, I had reason to take it more seriously," he said.

After college, he started touring with Mullen. He didn't have many other options, he jokes, having majored in religion and philosophy.

Tragically, Mullen died in a car accident three years ago after they completed work on McVicker's first self-titled album. McVicker spent a year recovering from the accident as well.

Since recovering, McVicker has pursued a solo career, moving to Nashville to be closer to the music industry, but never feeling at home there because he's always on the road. He gets labeled as a contemporary Christian artist, but that's a product of his faith, not design, he said. "When I write a song, it always expresses my faith and my relationship with God. That gets me lumped into the contemporary Christian genre," he explained.

McVicker now spends three-fourths of his time on the road. During his six-year career, he has been to each of the continental 48 states. He averages about 110 concerts a year with his four-man band.

"I love to travel. It wears me out like nothing (else), but it energizes me like nothing else, too," he said.

Life on the road is not as glorious as it may seem in books and movies about musicians, according to McVicker. They travel in a conversion van. "Half of it is jammed full of equipment and half of it is jammed full of us," he said.

"We generally sleep little and drive a lot," he added. When they get done driving, it's time to set up, perform, and put the equipment back in the van for their next gig.

"We don't really see a lot of places we go because we drive in and drive out. We do get to meet a lot of wonderful people, and I couldn't think of anything I'd rather or could do," said McVicker.

"Doing the concert is the bonus," he continued. "It's the good part."

He hopes to continue with his career for at least 15 years, God willing. "As long as I can make a living, I feel I need to be doing this," he said. "Until God pulls me in a different direction, I'll keep doing it."

"God has blessed me with certain gifts, and it's my job to take these and run with it how God would want," he added.

While in central Minnesota, McVicker also performed a concert in Alexandria to benefit the victims of the attacks of Sept. 11. He has noticed a change in attitude since those attacks. "I think ears are more open to what God might have to say," he said of the response he has seen in his audiences. "People are more open to spiritual things right now."

"You see the signs all over: 'God Bless America' and 'In God We Trust,' " he added.

For more information about McVicker, visit his website at www.mitchmcvicker.com.

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