



# Grace Notes

*A Publication of Metropolitan Music Ministries, Inc.*  
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It was with deep sadness that Metropolitan Music Ministries said good-bye to its beloved former chairman of the board, Dr. Martha Strawn Iley, on June 25, 2020. Her obituary follows:



## **Obituary for Dr. Martha Frances Strawn Iley**

Dr. Martha Frances Strawn Iley, 95, was promoted to the Church Triumphant on June 25, 2020 at her beloved home and surrounded by her family. Classical musician, wife and matriarch, philanthropist, hostess, academician, teacher, artist, ordained minister, writer, woman of deep Christian faith-Martha made every moment in life count, especially where it concerned her family and service to God and community.

Born June 1, 1925 to Dr. Stephen Hasty Strawn and Mrs. Lila Faircloth Strawn in Marshville, N.C. (a dentist and a schoolteacher), Martha was the oldest of four siblings. She had an idyllic childhood and excelled in academics, music and fine arts, and debate.

A lifelong student of learning, Martha's higher education began with a BA in music and social science from East Carolina University in 1946, followed by an MA from Western Kentucky U., Master of Music from Winthrop U., Master of Education from UNC-Charlotte, Doctor of Education from Nova U., capped by a Master of Theological Studies from Gordon-Cromwell Theological Seminary in 1998.

A very accomplished musician, Martha used her gifts as a vocalist and pianist to entertain, teach and serve Christ. In addition to private music lessons (which she continued up until just a few months before her passing), Martha taught piano, voice and theory at Charlotte area public and private schools as well as CPCC. She was very active in numerous professional musical

affiliations, just a few being the NC Music Teachers Association (V.P), Charlotte Piano Teachers' Forum (President), Queen City Music

Although known primarily for her prominence in the music world, Martha was also a talented artist and studied under the world- renowned late Paul Bartlett. Her family treasures to this day her beautiful paintings, needlework and ceramics. A skilled writer, Martha authored a collective memoir on music teaching, human interest essays, papers and articles on music, creativity, fine arts, theology, church history, music and worship, and was editor of several newsletters. She and her late husband of 61 years, Bryce Baxter Iley, loved offering their home for family/friend celebrations and social get-togethers with food, fellowship and lots of music. They were well known in the community as gracious and giving hosts.

In 1985, Martha was ordained to the Gospel Ministry in Music and Social Service through Providence Baptist Church in Charlotte, where she and Bryce were charter members. Martha's journey to ordination began in July 1976 when she became aware of a spiritual directive to use her musical talents and her faith to bring the gospel to unlikely, dreary places such as jails, homeless shelters, hospitals, rehabilitation centers and nursing homes, places Martha was already visiting and where she was dubbed "the Music Lady". She later described it as "mystical Call to do something special in the Kingdom", which resulted in her founding of the Metropolitan Music Ministry, Inc. in 1984 and it continues in operation. MMM has presented over 12,000 services or performances, over 500,724 persons have attended programs hosted by the organization and over 74 scholarships have been awarded to deserving musical students (please see [www.metromusicministries.org](http://www.metromusicministries.org)). On October 1, 2015, an article about Martha and MMM was

Club (Charter Member and VP) and Charlotte Mecklenburg Clergy Association. She was a frequent judge in voice and piano competitions.

featured in the Charlotte Observer.

Of the many awards and recognitions that Martha received throughout her life, two of her favorites were the 2002 Distinguished Alumni Award from ECU School of Music and in 2019, the dedication of the Martha Iley Music Library at Providence Baptist Church, honoring the many years of choral service Martha provided there and for many other area churches. She was particularly proud of the Cultural Arts Program she developed at CPCC in 1980 which helped provide greater accessibility for elderly and handicapped persons to local visual, literary and performing artists. The Program received national attention in 1981 and was included in the project directory of the Public Policy Symposium on the Arts, Humanities and Older Americans at the White House Conference.

Martha is preceded in death by her parents, her husband Bryce, daughter Mrs. Cheryl (Prentiss) Lindstrom, grandson Joshua McLean and siblings Joy Barbee, Stephen Strawn, Jr., and Helen Purdy. She is survived by her daughters Mrs. Deborah (Richard) Hodde; Mrs. Sheila (David) McLean; Mrs. Stephanie (Daniel) Salb; four sons-in-law; grandchildren Sharon (Isaac) Miller, Stephen (Megan) Hodde, Jeremy (Kendra) McLean, Kristen (Benjamin) Ligtino, Hailey Lindstrom, Carmen Salb, Alexander Salb, Charlotte Salb and thirteen great-grandchildren (which includes two sets of twins), many nieces and nephews and a host of friends, all of whom cannot imagine life without her.

A private family burial service was conducted at Carolina Memorial Park, with a public memorial service to be announced as soon as current health restrictions are lifted.

To keep Martha's dream of an annual scholarship program going please consider contributing to the MMM Scholarship Program using the enclosed giving envelope. Or, mail your donation to PO Box 12736, Charlotte, NC 28220 or see web address above. Donations are used to support music scholarship for talented students in North and South Carolina colleges.

## We Share Our Memories...



Catherine Stout, vice president; Rebecca Echerd, secretary, and Dr. Martha Iley, president of Metropolitan Music Ministries, Inc.

“It was a dreadfully hot day...July 1, 1976. I was working with the residents of Hawthorne Nursing Center to prepare a patriotic program when I stepped out on the third-floor balcony for a breath of fresh air....The air seemed strangely full of significant meaning. I became aware of a Presence with a message for me. There was a communication of mind and spirit, a mystical call to do something special in the Kingdom. It involved taking my music, my faith, and love for people out into some bleak and desolate places in the city.

Over the years, I began feeling drawn to outreach. Activities that I was already doing (bringing my children’s choirs to sing in hospitals and nursing homes) became more significant. Church music friends Becky Echerd and Catherine Stout became seriously involved. We realized how satisfying it was to offer ourselves in bringing music and chapel services to places out of the mainstream.”

--excerpt from “Remembering the Call” by Martha Iley. *Grace Notes*, June, 2020.

“For many years we have had a special interest in the people in our community who are experiencing some of life’s most difficult problems—persons in hospitals, nursing homes, jails, and prisons, and those beyond the usual reaches of the area churches. Through our visits with musical presentations and devotionals, we have tried to minister, in a small way, to these people. Often, we have wished that we could enlarge our outreach to the special populations. At last we have the possibility of realizing this dream.

Plans are being made to initiate the METROPOLITAN MUSIC MINISTRIES, Inc., which will officially begin work in the fall [1984].”

In Christian love,

Martha Strawn Iley  
Rebecca Carr Echerd  
Catherine Freeman Stout

--excerpt from letter to Charlotte Rehabilitation Hospital  
(August 8, 1984)





Martha ready for another MMM Annual Service. She lovingly worked on 34 Annual Services.

A visionary mind and a heart guided by faith called Martha to develop and manage the various facets of MMM. Tirelessly, Martha generated plans, lists, and programs to carry music out into the community. A small card table in her dining room sheltered piles of papers, music, resources, and names all for the cause of MMM. A cloth covering would daintily cocoon the assortment as if out of sight but never out of mind. She knew where each detail rested and its state of completion. The little table was filled with details yet none too small that Martha gave pause to see it through to its end.

Martha poured over the mailing list aiming to keep addresses and names current desiring that everyone she had encountered could receive information about MMM. Her Chairman's message and photo defined the front cover of the semi-annual newsletter. She always shared an encouraging word of how music had touched a life and brightened the spirit. This gift of devotion was also shared for years in service to the Charlotte Piano Teachers Forum as Chaplain. Martha frequently opened Executive Board meetings with a devotional gleaned from years of teaching and her ministry with MMM.

Martha never stopped preparing for an annual service. The Sunday evening post-service was always a relieved celebration as participants mingled among punch and cookies, exchanging gracious words, and many seeking to speak with Martha. Monday might pass exhausted and quiet, but Tuesday there was sure to be a phone call to debrief and discuss details for the coming year. She was always considering which choirs to ask and what the theme should be; she searched for the perfect scriptures, melodic motif, hymns, and anthems for the combined choirs. New lists were dictated although not to be fulfilled for yet another year.

Precious conversations at the family dinner table and many phone calls discussed ministry details and niceties. The Southern Lady usually inquired about family while sharing her own updates. Discussions could explore any topic. Martha was always ready to chat. If you ever had the privilege of receiving a call from her, you, too, can still hear the gentile gait of her greeting, "This is ... Maaahthaaah ... Iiiiiley." This graciousness did not stop with conversations in person or by phone. No. Martha composed beloved notes for birthday, thank-you, and sympathy cards. You knew by the script penmanship that something special awaited inside the perfectly crafted envelope. Each stroke carried words to encourage, celebrate, and acknowledge the receiver.

A visit in her home was filled with hospitality. Many MMM events took place at Martha's with board members and spouses scattered in each room. Everyone felt welcome, greeted by tables festooned with linens, china, and crystal. A pot of spiced tea and cups awaited the arrival of guests to the living room, and music was sure to abound with singing by all at the annual Epiphany dinner.

It is my blessing to know Martha, Bryce, and their family--Bryce's humor and Martha's tenacity--both with a heart for service. The handprint that outlasts our earthly life bears a legacy precious to many. Thank you, Martha, for your handprint that is MMM.

--Ginger Wyrick  
Current MMM Board Member  
Co-planner, r MMM Annual Service



Martha at one of the receptions following the Annual Service. Friends lined up to greet her and share their compliments about the content of each program

Martha exhibited grace and fortitude in everything she tackled. It took courage to start Metropolitan Music Ministries, and it took internal strength to nurture it and lead it through the years. She guided MMM with love and tender care as board members changed and the organization itself took on an additional focus from its original charter. The new focus was the development of a strong music scholarship program. This year that program will offer \$6,000 in financial assistance to deserving college music and music therapy majors. Scholarships are available in organ, voice, piano, and music therapy.

Martha delighted in keeping in touch with former scholarship winners. She wrote notes of encouragement and, in return, received appreciative notes and calls from numerous geographic locations where the scholarship winners landed due to job opportunities.

We all appreciated Martha's interest in MMM and its various activities in the community. We will miss her.

--Diann P. Back  
Past President, MMM



Wilna Eury and Martha collect tickets and money at Dolcé, an MMM fundraiser.

When Diann asked me to write a few words about Martha, I almost said "No". But then I remembered "No" was not in Martha's vocabulary. Martha called in 2013 and asked if I would serve as an Advisor with MMM. My first answer was "No, I have no background in music". Her response was "Do you have computer skills?" My answer was "Yes", and my no became a yes. Thank goodness I didn't have to sing or play the piano to become a volunteer. All I needed to do was keep the mailing list updated. To do that, Martha and I had many telephone chats not only about updating the list but just talking. During those chats I learned we both had attended First Baptist Church in Concord in the late 40's, heard the joy in her voice when a new great-grandchild was born and the sadness when a member of the family passed away. I will miss those telephone chats and the time spent at our monthly Prayer Luncheon meeting.

--Wilna Eury  
Current MMM Board Member



Martha and Mitchell Hagler working on last minute details for 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary MMM Annual Service.

I'm not sure when I first met Martha but when I joined the MMM Board she reminded me that we had a connection because she had taught piano part-time at Central Piedmont Community College where I worked for almost five decades.

As I got to know her, I was in awe of her boundless energy. She was not only a founder of MMM but she touched every aspect of it. And she did it in such a professional way with the added charm of a Southern lady.

Martha Iley was a scholar that decided to pursue a doctorate at the age when most people are thinking about retiring; a musician that was teaching piano students just a few months before her death; a disciple of deep faith who wrote so honestly this past June about "receiving a mystical call to do something special in the kingdom...and MMM was born; a good judge of character and talent who helped populate the MMM Board of Directors with dedicated and talented folks; a skilled writer who contributed to every issue of *Grace Notes*; a gracious hostess who loved filling her beautiful home with laughter and much singing; and a tireless worker who understood so well the meaning of "servant leader."

She was so brave with her medical issues and I'm sure she would agree that "Music was my refuge. I could crawl into the space between the notes and curl my back to loneliness." — Maya Angelou

She touched so many, many lives and she will be sorely missed.

--Mitchell Hagler  
Former Board Member

The MMM newsletter will be published in digital format after this edition. If you would like to continue to receive copies of *Grace Notes*, please submit your email address to [www.http://www.metromusicministries.org/NewletterandNews.html](http://www.metromusicministries.org/NewletterandNews.html) and click on **Contact Us**.



Bryce, Stephanie, Martha, Sheila, and Debbie

AMAZING is the only word I know to describe Martha Iley. She was a Wife, Mother, Musician, and Friend.

Martha will be missed by all who knew her, and I will miss my good friend.

--Pat McKenzie  
MMM Board Member

A Litany of Dedication Metropolitan Music Ministries,  
Charlotte Rehabilitation Hospital  
October 7, 1984

We gather today in the fellowship that is in Christ, proclaiming our faith and committing our efforts to the One who sends us to tend the sheep. Give us Thy harmony, O Lord, that we may understand the beauty of the sky, the rhythm of the soft wind's lullaby, the sun and shadow of woods in spring or autumn splendor, and Thy great love that dwells in everything.

For music,

Music that lifts the heart from the earth and flings wide the portals of heaven. God's name be praised.

For the opportunity to minister in Thy name to those who are burdened with illness, sorrow, discouragement, imprisonment, infirmities of the aged or estrangement from Thee, for this privilege we thank thee, Lord.

As we dedicate the Metropolitan Music Ministries to Thy glory, we seek Thy guidance, dominion and benediction, and Thy blessings, dear Father.

Master and Lord, teach us to love our fellow pilgrims with a love that shall be Thy love breaking into the world through us. Illumine our souls with a knowledge of Thy divine beauty and truth that shall fill us with joy and peace.

### MMM Executive Board

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### MMM Mission Statement

**Metropolitan Music Ministries is a Christian service organization of volunteers committed to sharing the gifts of music with the community for the glory of God by awarding scholarships to aspiring church musicians and music therapists and by presenting programs of music and devotions (for residents of care facilities).**

