

**Deborah A. Confredo
Leadership Statement**

We Are Called to Serve

My journey in NAFME began as a freshman in college in 1976 (I still have my collegiate membership card). I was a pretty naïve kid and at the time, I didn't really know much about MENC. What I knew was that, as a Pennsylvanian, PMEA hosted a bunch of honor ensembles that I took part in while in high school and that was about it. My dear friend and junior high school choral director called my home when I was there on spring break during my freshman year in college to ask if I was going to PMEA, being held that year in Philadelphia. Even though I was a collegiate member of MENC, I was oblivious to the conference. She told me to find something nice to wear and to be waiting for her at 7:30 the next morning when she would pick me up. On the ride into Philadelphia, she said that we were going to go to as many different sessions as we could – not just the choir or band stuff. My dear choral teacher was a leader that weekend, if only just to me. She helped to open my eyes to what could be and that to which I should aspire. My journey of some 45 years has led me into elementary, middle and high school classrooms and rehearsal halls, to colleges and universities. And it led me to lead through service.

Music educators grapple with the concept of leadership fairly regularly. In our educational positions, ***we are all called to serve***. We are called to carve and light paths, to be the GPS that offers multiple ways to move from one point to the next, all the while highlighting what is good and interesting, challenging and right about each. We are called to facilitate the musical development of our children and to educate their parents, our communities, and peers. We are called to give voice to those who have been silenced, to open doors for those who have found them locked, to envision a future that takes the best of who and what we are and strive to make it better. We are called to celebrate a world of music by removing barriers and ensuring accessibility. ***We are all called to serve.***

In 2019 during the National Assembly, President-Elect Scott Sheehan was asked about some of the challenges that NAFME faces and one of the things he discussed was coming to grips with who we are and what should we be. Since that time, our profession, the way in which we make a living, has faced the tremendous challenges posed by the pandemic. Our comfortable place was shaken loose and we wondered if all that we knew as music educators might be lost. We had time to reflect and ask ourselves, as individuals and as a collective, as Scott did, "Who are we and what should we be?" In the words of Winston Churchill, "We make a living by what we get. We make a life by what we give." Music educators, in response to the pandemic, made the decision to make a life through giving; servant leaders are called to spearhead the charge.

Because of our pledge as music educators, to work in loco parentis and to shape people, our lives as teachers are naturally spent in service. Beyond the classroom, NAFME, its societies, councils, and state MEAs exist and thrive because of strong, committed music educators whose pledge includes that of servant leadership. The responsibility of the servant leader is to

facilitate, elevate others, create possibilities to replace doubt and uncertainty, and to empower individuals, particularly the marginalized, to speak out and act for the good of many. It is to identify a diversity of resources, talent and willingness, while creating an atmosphere that acts as a motivator for those who may have never felt connected or, worse, may have felt excluded. Now, more than ever before and through the current momentum of the organization, there is an urgent need for outreach and inclusion in the mechanisms that support NAFME. I feel that I am well-situated and uniquely qualified to be that servant leader for our organization.

During my career, I have been a member of PMEA, FMEA, NYSSMA, ILMEA, NJMEA, LMEA, and TMEA. In service to ILMEA, I chaired the Research Division and wrote the research column for the ILMEA journal. This is where I first worked to bridge the chasm between the university and the schools and between philosophy and implementation in my regular column, "Research Into Practice". I spent time chairing PMEA's Research Division as well and am active in the conference submission review process. I am a charter member of the Louisiana Music Adjudicators' Association (an arm of LMEA), as well as an active member of the LMEA Council on Diversity Equity and Inclusion and the LMEA Professional Development Committee. I mentored collegiate MENC members at four universities: Penn State, Florida State, Illinois State, and the University of Illinois. In direct service to NAFME, I have been involved in two decades of service. I was chair of the Instructional Strategies Special Research Interest Group, as well as chair-elect of the Gender/Diversity Special Research Interest Group before stepping down to take a position on the editorial board of the Journal for Research in Music Education, for which I provided two, 6-year terms. In related service, I spent several years on the advisory board of the Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education, and a term as associate editor and then editor. I have just completed a 6-year term on the Executive Committee of the Society for Research in Music Education during which I was conference program chair and then committee chair as we navigated the challenges of hosting a virtual conference during the pandemic. As part of the Society for Music Teacher Education, I served on the Teaching Music Methods Steering Committee, and was a facilitator for the Vision 2020 conference in Tallahassee in 1999. I have been a delegate to the National Assembly, a committee member of the NAFME Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Focus Group during the Cook Ross study, a member of the Professional Development Committee, the National Executive Director Search Committee, co-chair of the Eastern Division Higher Education and Research Strands for 2021, and currently help to coordinate the NAFME Music Teacher Preparation Initiative. My experience as a Department Chair, Director of Graduate Studies in Music Education, Director of Online Studies in Music Education, and Chair of the Promotion and Tenure Committee for the Boyer College of Music and Dance at Temple University brings my lifetime of service and leadership to full circle.

As I reflect on a career of service, I learned a great deal about myself and about the act of leading. Frankly, there are so many lessons and take-aways that it would be impossible to list them all here. I will share a few things that I feel have shaped me the most. Foremost in these lessons is that of trust. The sun does not rise and set in one person and leaders who choose to "go it alone" usually end up doing just that. Developing and giving trust is a critical component in teaching, as we know. Likewise, it must be present in the servant leader who should be well-

equipped to identify good people to forward causes, as well as be capable of teaching, encouraging, and providing space and freedom for individuals to thrive. Good leaders find the best folks they can and trust them and their capabilities. They promote collaborative processes and are heartened by the power of partnership. Trust builds trust and confidence; it even sows the seeds for the next generation of leaders.

I learned that humility is essential for the servant leader to be an effective facilitator who is able to put others forward. A leader who is self-absorbed is destined to work as an isolated figurehead rather than a gatherer of those who are willing to listen, understand, and contribute.

I learned that talk is important and providing a forum for open expression and discourse is crucial to leading our music education culture forward. And I learned that talk, alone, does not *DO*. Talk must lead to actionable steps toward the movement of the culture. Both pieces must exist; talk without action keeps us static and action without talk is often misguided. As an indispensable companion to talk and action is listening. I learned that people must be heard and understood and this comes through active and sincere listening. One person cannot know all of the issues that challenge those in our membership or their students. The benevolent servant leader must seek first to understand through listening. In this way, all stakeholders have a seat at the table and can readily take ownership in their NAFME.

I learned that good leaders must be empathetic, understanding that there is a rich diversity of constituents and a richer diversity of students who are the soul of music education in the United States. The experiences of one person, regardless of who occupies the seat of leadership, cannot match the richness of our collective and individual experiences. The empathetic leader creates an environment of belonging where all are celebrated and in which diversity of experience and opinion are recognized.

Finally, I learned that, although some problems are not easily solved, it is incumbent upon the servant leader to try. It is in the trying that we move the ball down the field, even if only by inches at a time. Perhaps there is a tangentially related issue that can, indeed, be solved. Perhaps it is the question itself that is the barrier. Perhaps the seemingly unsolvable problem needs to be revisited and recast so as to make a solution more conceivable. Meeting issues head-on, especially matters that are most difficult to address, demonstrates our resoluteness.

My belief in and service to NAFME is unwavering and my contributions will be ongoing. I will trust as I have been trusted, listen and act as those who came before me, lead as I have been led, with openness, humility, confidence, and optimism. I am called to serve.