

Banding together for a good cause

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

LYONS — Alex Watkins says he's not dead-set against all modern music, as his collection of Metallica songs would prove. But he does have strong feelings about the quality — or lack thereof — of hip-hop tunes and the harsh lyrics that frequently go with them.

"Some of those songs I don't even see as music. They're just talking, and some of it's just cruel," said Alex, 17.

Most of Alex's musical interests don't surface on top-40 stations. The band in which he performs, For Goodness Sake, plays hits going back nearly a century. Depending on the audience, the group might play country tunes, or Beatles music, or more recent classics such as "American Pie" with some pop songs from the 1980s. Or band members might reach back into an earlier era for, perhaps, "The Tennessee Waltz."

While offering musical versatility, the group is consistent with its cause: All of its gigs are devoted to charity. Since For Goodness Sake was formed in 1999, some of its fundraising beneficiaries have been Catholic Charities, Mercy Flight, Red Cross, House of John and Lyons Vacation Bible School. The group also performs free for such organizations as the Wayne County Nursing Home.

Alex plays the bass and occasionally serves as sound-system coordinator. He is the only non-adult in the group, which also includes his father Bill, a guitarist. The band's name "tells the whole story. It's one of those titles that says it all," according to Bill Watkins.

When performing fundraisers, band members pass a hat rather than charge an admission fee. Their audiences can range from a few dozen to several hundred. "I feel we're always very well received," Bill Watkins said.

Alex said he enjoys his involvement with For Goodness Sake, commenting, "After you've done it, it makes you feel a little better that you've done something for someone else. It's not always for yourself."

His dedication to For Goodness Sake is appreciated by another band member, the Rev. Cynthia Huling Hummel, who rates Alex "a fine musician" as well as "a terrific young man."

"He has great compassion and gets along well with people of all ages," stated Rev. Hummel, pastor of the First Presbyterian Church of Lyons.

Bill Watkins noted that Alex is also very involved at their parish, St.



High-school senior Alex Watkins (left), a parishioner at St. Michael Parish in Lyons, plays the bass with the band For Goodness Sake at the Wayne County Nursing Home Nov. 1.

Jason Rearick/Catholic Courier



Alex performs with band members Sally Smith and Gene Morrel.

Michael in Lyons, where the elder Watkins serves as contemporary choir director. Alex plays in that group and is a eucharistic minister and altar server as well. His volunteerism earned him a diocesan Hands of Christ award earlier this fall. The awards recognize high-school seniors for outstanding service in school, church and community.

Father and son enjoy pointing out that Alex's connection to both music and church began at a very young age. When Alex was an infant, Bill used to place Alex inside his velvet-lined guitar case so Alex could nap



during Mass. (Yes, Bill left the case open.)

Alex's musical background encompasses many instruments, including the French horn, viola, tuba, trumpet, string bass and electric bass. "All through our home, there's musical instruments all over the place," he remarked. "I'm building a bass guitar and hopefully my father can help, with his expertise."

Alex also performs in several scholastic music groups. However,



Wayne County Nursing Home resident William Gavitt enjoys the music.

after he graduates from Lyons High School this June, he said he'll most likely pursue musical engineering, rather than performing, in college. "I like the technical stuff," he said.

You can also forget about Alex as a vocalist — now or at any other time.

"I didn't inherit that trait," he said with a laugh.