Attending the WRAMTA (Western Region Chapter, American Music Therapy Association) conference in Portland, Oregon from March 27th to March 29th was very beneficial to furthering my discernment of my vocation.

Since high school, I have believed my vocation was to be a music therapist because it is about using the gift of music to bring healing into others’ lives. I am passionate about that. The conference was a taste of reality for me in a sense. I can tend to get idealistic and did not fully realize all the work and involvement it takes to provide successful music therapy services. I learned that research, and continuing education (CMTE courses) is essential and required for all music therapists. I did not realize that after one enters the field, they have to get 20 or so credits within 5 years to be able to keep their license. At first, I did not like the idea of that but then I realized that as a music therapist, there is still so much more to learn from others in the field. It ultimately will be more advantageous for the clients if the therapist continues to gain knowledge.

At the conference, I learned of the importance of networking with other professionals and music therapists. I connected with a few people who were in the middle of their internships. I got to hear from them how it was very challenging but how they loved it and that it was well-worth it. That was very encouraging to hear and made me more excited about picking my internship in the future. It was wonderful to be with so many professional music therapists and students because it really felt like a welcoming, kind and open community. This gave me reassurance about picking music therapy as a profession because of how much support there is—as well as giving me motivation to be even more outgoing and connect with others more at the next conference.

I went to many sessions but three stood out because they greatly inspired me. One was called Hip-Hop for Hope: Rap writing with Live Music as a Positive Intervention. I learned how free style rapping with certain, simple prompts such as “I got this” or “sometimes I… (unpleasant experiences) but I also…. (what do I have? What went well?)” or even “I’m...(identified strengths) and I want to… (what strengths do I want to build?)” is a great tool for self-expression, increasing self-esteem, building community and promoting positive coping skills. There were practical demonstrations and we also got to try rapping as well. This is an intervention I now have confidence in leading. It also gave me more passion in my calling to start some kind of music therapy service for the homeless because I could see how this intervention could apply to that population. Also, there was another session called “What to Do When the Pain Never Ends”. I presumed it would be about chronic pain but it was actually about trauma. It was the first time I learned the science behind how one’s brain deals with trauma. I learned several tips, techniques and tools for how to help those who have gone through traumatic experiences. It greatly interested me and inspired me to look into doing music therapy for that population.

The main reason why the conference was helpful in my vocational discernment was because it motivated me to be bold in somehow incorporating the Christian faith with music therapy. Because of who I am, I cannot separate my profession from my faith. God has convicted me to be bold in speaking His truth and love no matter where I am. At the conference, I got the impression that there is some kind of connection between music therapy and Buddhist/Eastern spiritual practices because of some of the things they were teaching. That and hearing several people say “I believe in myself”, was at first really discouraging to me but then I decided to change my mindset and let it motivate me to be different—instead of fitting into the mold. It increased my conviction and passion to provide Christian music therapy services in some shape or form in the future.