



THE BASILICA OF SAINTS PETER AND PAUL
CHATTANOOGA, TENNESSEE

DATE: April 27, 2015

TO: Basilica Staff and Musicians

RE: Vision and structure of our sacred music program

As a minor Basilica, our parish has both the responsibility and the privilege to carry out the liturgy with great care. During the 2015 liturgical year, we have begun to incorporate several traditional elements of Catholic worship, such as periodic *ad orientem* celebration, a monthly *Missa Cantata* in the ancient form of the Roman rite, and the gradual re-integration of the Church's treasury of Gregorian chant into our Ordinary Form Masses, principally at our 11:30 Sunday Mass.

We at the Basilica are honored to have an apostolate of beauty. Our church building's architecture, its artwork, and our parish's past and current efforts to restore the church to its previous glorified state are all testaments to our apostolate. But there is another element of beauty, the music of the liturgy, which serves a greater role in this apostolate. As Pope St. John Paul II said in 1989, "music performs a function which is noble, unique, and irreplaceable. When it is truly beautiful and inspired, it speaks to us more than all the other arts of goodness, virtue, peace, of matters, holy and divine." He quoted Pope Pius X to say, "The more closely a composition for church approaches in its movement, inspiration and savor the Gregorian form, the more sacred and liturgical it becomes, and the more out of harmony it is with that supreme model, the less worthy it is of the temple."

Pope Pius X identified three characteristics that define sacred music: *holiness, beauty of form, and universality*. The Church has consistently proposed Gregorian chant as the paradigm of sacred music. Contrary to popular belief, the Second Vatican council actually encouraged the preservation of Gregorian chant in the liturgy. The revised *Graduale Romanum* was published in 1974 with the chants proper to each liturgy, but it was largely ignored in the wake of Vatican II, in favor of a rapid move to the vernacular and secularized styles of music. Today there is a growing movement to return to the traditional sacred music of the Church and restore Gregorian chant to its prescribed place in the liturgy. I would like to continue this effort at the Basilica, little by little, with an ultimate goal of realizing the Church's supreme model of sacred music of the liturgy, in both forms of the Roman rite.

One thing we do well at the Basilica is the singing of congregational hymns at our Sunday Masses. Our congregation is familiar with a more traditional repertory of hymns, and we have cantors, choirs, and a magnificent pipe organ to support congregational singing. These hymns have become an important part of our expression of faith and our cultural tradition, and I intend to continue having them sung during our regular weekend Masses. For example, we still sing a congregational hymn as a prelude prior to the entrance procession, which is now accompanied by the proper Introit chant. However, it is important to

understand, though it may come as a surprise to many of us raised in modern times, that congregational hymns are not the primary music of the liturgy. Also, the *participatio actuosa* (active – or more directly translated – *actual* participation) of the faithful that was famously encouraged by Vatican II does not result primarily from the congregational singing of hymns, but from the interior experience of being engaged in all the parts of the Mass, including by listening and by sacred silence, when appropriate.

To engage the faithful in the singing of the Mass, it is of primary importance that the celebrant and deacon sing certain parts of the rite that are assigned to them, which in turn leads the congregation to sing their responses. We have been doing a good job of this at the Basilica already. On some feast days, the Gospel may also be chanted. At the appointed times, we opt to sing special chants, such as the Christmas Proclamation, the Proclamation of the Date of Easter on Epiphany, and the Exsultet, chanted by the deacon or celebrant on the Easter Vigil. In these instances, although we intend to present these the vernacular, it is still desirable to sing them in their ancient musical setting.

Next, it is important to make every effort to teach the faithful to sing the Ordinary parts of the Mass that belong to the congregation: namely, the Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, Agnus Dei, Our Father, and - eventually - the Creed. At the Basilica our congregation is already familiar with two English chant settings of the Ordinary on Sundays: *Missa Simplex* and the *Roman Missal Chant Mass*. Pope Paul VI asked that all faithful throughout the world be taught to sing the simplest Latin Mass setting, *Missa Jubilate Deo*, as well as the Gloria from *Missa de Angelis*, along with several other common prayers and chants. This option offers universality in multilingual parishes. This past Lent, we continued our practice of singing *Missa Jubilate Deo* a capella at all weekend Masses. During Eastertide, our choirs and cantors are leading the congregation in singing *Missa de Angelis* at all weekend Masses. I believe that if we sing this setting several weeks in succession, the congregation will embrace it more comfortably, and can easily pick it up again next Christmas season. Fortunately, all these Mass settings are included in our new St. Michael Hymnal.

Our next priority, which is well under way at the Basilica, is to acquaint the faithful with hearing the prescribed chants for each Mass that are intended to accompany sacred actions during the Mass, particularly the Entrance procession, the Offertory, and Holy Communion, and Sequences on certain feast days. These so-called “proper” chants of the Mass, normally assigned to the choir or cantor(s), have largely been supplanted by congregational hymns since Vatican II. But here at the Basilica we have already begun the effort to restore them, singing them to simple Psalm tones, choral settings, and sometimes their ancient Gregorian settings. Because we now have the St. Isaac Jogues Missals in the pews, the congregation is now able to read the English texts of the propers, alongside the ancient Latin, which makes it possible not only for them to experience the richness of the chants in their original settings, but to comprehend their meaning.

The Church has always encouraged the development of choirs, and in *Domus Ecclesiae*, basilicas in particular are exhorted to develop scholae cantorum who, through their singing, encourage the congregation to participate in the Mass. For now, I am asking our Gloria Dei Schola to provide this

service at the 11:30 Mass through the singing of the propers in English and – gradually – Latin. I also very much like that each of our Basilica choirs – 11:30 choir/schola, 9:00 parish choir, and the Jubilate Deo Youth Schola – are regularly offering a motet, hymn, or other song appropriate to the Sunday Mass whenever possible. I recognize that preparing these songs takes considerable effort, and that it depends on the abilities of and workload the choir at the time. I want to encourage everyone involved in the music that it does not have to be 8-part polyphony every week in order to be beautiful. Even a simple unison hymn with an appropriate theme, offered reverently during the Offertory or Holy Communion, can truly enhance the celebration of the Mass by all assembled. During these parts of the Mass, when a procession is ongoing, the rubrics do not require that the congregation actually be singing in order to participate fully. The congregation will occasionally enjoy being able to observe the sacred actions ongoing, receive Communion without carrying a hymnal, and offer their thanksgiving silently, while basking in a beautiful song offered by the choir.

I recognize that the parameters of the ideal sacred music of the liturgy are not familiar to many parishioners – the propers, the use of Latin, Gregorian chant, etc. I have begun to educate the congregation during this year’s transition period by speaking about sacred music in my homilies and by offering catechetical handouts in the bulletins. This effort will be an ongoing process.

I want to thank all of you who are instrumental in supporting the Sacred Liturgy at the Basilica. I welcome your input on ways we can fulfill this vision for sacred music at the Basilica. Embracing tradition can be challenging, but at the same time it offers a chance for us all to gain a deeper understanding of our Catholic heritage and the truths that led to the traditions. We will make mistakes from time to time, and that is okay. Let us go forward joyfully and with patience and charity.

Sincerely yours in Christ,

Father David Carter