

Sacred Music Program at the Basilica of Sts. Peter and Paul

2016 Report of Activities

by Maria Rist, Sacred Music Coordinator
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With our adult choirs, our Jubilate Deo Youth Schola, and our Spanish choir, about 110 people of all ages are currently involved in our sacred music program. But our music program truly involves all our clergy and the entire worshipping assembly.

Last year, we introduced the singing of all the propers designated by the Church including the Entrance, Offertory, and Communion Chant, which doubled the number of Scriptures that we hear at each sung Mass. We are ministers of the Word!

This year, with Fr. Carter's pastoral direction, we worked to develop *progressive solemnity* among the various celebrations within the liturgical calendar and even among our different Mass times. We designated parts to be sung at each Mass based on the degrees delineated by the Church in *Musicam Sacram*, the current musical law of the Church since Vatican II. We now have a **fully sung principal Mass** each weekend, and on most holy days we have a sung Mass.

Clergy Leadership – Our priests have participated in the learning process and are singing all their parts, even as we cycle through different settings of the sung Ordinary. Our three resident deacons received sacred music formation this year through two workshops and private coaching to help them to chant their assigned parts. As a congregation we are now chanting all our parts during Mass, and more confidently.

Introduction of Sacred Music to the Spanish-speaking Congregation -

We are working with the Spanish choir and the Sisters to teach them sacred music.

We developed a model for celebrating bilingual Masses according to Church guidelines.

We introduced the Church's treasury of Gregorian chant to the Spanish congregation, and they now chant every Sunday either in Latin or in Spanish.

We have started singing the propers in Spanish at some of our bilingual Masses.

We are catechizing the congregation on what they are doing and why, through Spanish language in the same way our English-speaking congregation received that formation last year from the pulpit and by printed articles, now translated to Spanish.

Collaboration between the communities on these bilingual Masses has created bonds that we hadn't previously imagined. Someone told me that they had heard our choir's singing on many occasions, but at the first bilingual Mass we sang together, which was the Feast of St. Joseph, something was so different and more beautiful about it than before. What we find in our Spanish-speaking community is a level of commitment to the Church that is unparalleled. They are here at the Basilica almost every day, working, learning, and worshipping together.

Fr. Santiago was here over the summer and with his experience and zeal he inspired the choir to learn some beautiful songs of the Spanish culture that we are now singing in our bilingual Masses.

Our bilingual Masses are really trilingual, as the music is centered on the universal songs of the Church in Latin. These liturgies give all of us an opportunity to experience the music that unites us as Catholics.

Wedding liturgies - Improved our process of helping couples plan their wedding liturgies at the Basilica: Coordinated the music for 21 weddings. Choir sang for 3 of those. Two were couples who were formerly in the choir.

Funeral liturgies - Developed a simpler way to assist families who are preparing for a funeral, in line with Church guidelines. We coordinated and provided music for 12 funerals.

Many liturgies served – Our choirs and cantors have provided music at all but two of our weekend Masses this year. Besides the regular Sunday Masses, we have sung 12 ancient form and 24 special liturgies. For our active singers that means up to 75 Masses this year, and there is at least one faithful choir member who has sung about 125 Masses. Our dedicated organist has played all but two of our Masses that had organ music. Including weddings and funerals, that makes over 200 Masses.

We had 9 bilingual celebrations including St. Joseph Day, Holy Week, Corpus Christi procession, The Assumption, the diocesan Marriage Mass, the Pope John Paul II feast day, and a beautiful All Saints Mass followed by a party.

Much music learned - Our choirs have been singing together for about 2 years now, and we have developed a repertory of over 75 choral or polyphonic pieces including our first full polyphonic sung Ordinary, 45 Gregorian chant hymns, and countless traditional hymns of the Church, including about a dozen in Spanish. This experience helps make it easier to prepare special music for our liturgies. But the primary songs given by the Church to the choir – the propers of the Mass – change with every Mass and must be learned anew for every Mass. This means we can't just show up and sing; we must practice for *every Mass*. In all our choirs, with experience, we are becoming more adept at learning new music more quickly. Of course, as we experience turnover, there is a continuous learning curve.

Many hours served - With all the rehearsals and liturgies we have participated in, our more active singers have put in an estimated 330 hours at the Basilica this year.

Concerts - We have hosted two successful organ recitals and a sacred choral concert by the UTC Chamber Singers (over 400 people, largely visitors) – all with no admission charge – at almost no cost to the Basilica.

Programs for Youth –

Our **St. Cecilia Classroom** has 28 piano students, including a couple of young organ students. About two thirds of the students are parishioners at the Basilica. They offer a winter recital and a spring recital each year, and these are open to the parish.

Our **Jubilate Deo Youth Schola** practices every Friday and contributes to parish life by singing twice a month in our English, Latin, and Spanish Masses, as well as First Friday Adoration, Corpus Christi, the May Crowning, and St. Nicholas dinner. This fall we doubled in size for the third time. We now have 45 regular students. This year we have introduced three improvements

- 1) Beginning to integrate our singers from the Spanish speaking community. This year we had a successful summer program that integrated the Spanish and English speaking youth, with the help of Fr. Santiago Ordonez, and introduced them to three-part choral music in three languages.
- 2) The addition of a bass group within the Boys' Schola under Fr. Carter, to support boys as their voices naturally change and develop.
- 3) Teaching the papally-recognized classic Ward method of music instruction for Catholics, to help our children learn to read and sing music. Last summer, Andrea and I invested in a summer course in Pittsburgh to learn this method. It was the first time this material was taught through the Church Music Association of America.

Organ - Our parish organist, Andrea Tierney, is working toward an organ degree. She is taking private lessons and developing improvisation skills to help her accompany the liturgical actions during the Mass. She is also the first Catholic organist in our area to join the American Guild of Organists. By offering recitals and tours to students, through her connections, she is exposing our organ to non-Catholics organists and music students who are interested in learning more about the Catholic Church and our tradition.

Community Outreach and Education

Our music program is an outreach beyond our walls and source of inspiration, help, and networking for other parishes.

In July we hosted a workshop for beginning and advanced Church musicians and clergy from around the Southeast that included spiritual formation and practical classes in Gregorian chant, polyphony, use of the organ, funerals, and sacred music resources. This workshop drew in about 120 guests from 7 states. It was useful not only by teaching technical skills necessary to implement sacred music in parishes, but also by inspiring participants through the experience of a fully sung Mass and a solemn Vespers. We also published a 226-page resource book full of helpful resources for continuing their progress in their home parishes. Feedback was very positive.

We started a new **Southeastern chapter of the Church Music Association of America (CMAA)** when we hosted the Summer Sacred Music Workshop in July, and through our preparation of this workshop we established the infrastructure for advertising, registration, and course materials for other parishes to be able to more easily host the workshop in future years, and we plan to remain involved.

We compiled a contact list to allow music directors within our diocese to network. The previous contact list had not been updated in many years.

With Father Blatchford's initiative, we assisted the UTC Newman Center's singers in learning how to chant the people's parts. Their music director then joined our music program, and she is now learning skills every week that she can apply at the Newman Center.

We are working with another parish in the deanery, at their request, to help them start singing the parts of the Mass.

Our program has attracted the attention of our diocese and the Church Music Association of America. Both requested and published articles about our music program. We did an interview for EWTN's Extraordinary Faith TV awhile ago also, but it has not aired yet.

Ancient Form Mass

Our ancient form Mass is now an established offering at the Basilica, and all three of our priests are able to offer the Missa Cantata as well as the Low Mass now. We have a separate team of altar servers trained for this form, and a few ushers/greeters/announcers. We also now have a staff nursery worker to serve during the Missa Cantata. Our Basilica Potluck Committee hosts a potluck that immediately follows each Mass. During this past year, usual attendance has increased to about 100-120, up from about 80-100 in 2015, even though we are doing less advertising now than we did initially. Some of the increase comes from families who became involved at the Basilica through participation in this Mass or in our overall music program. People enjoy the opportunity for fellowship at the Basilica Potluck held on the same night. There are a number of visitors and inquirers at each Mass, from different faith backgrounds, and people say that this form of worship resonates with them in a way that no other does. For all of us, it provides an opportunity to hear and sing the traditional music of the Church in Latin. What we learn in ancient form can enhance our experience and appreciation of the Novus Ordo. As one example, we had been chanting the ancient Creed in Latin at our Missa Cantata for over a year, and then this year we began singing that same tone in English at our 11:30 Mass. It didn't take long for the congregation to adopt this chant.

Challenges

Many Liturgies/Few Singers - Our singers have other priorities besides singing in the choir. As a Basilica we celebrate many feasts on weekdays or Saturdays, and it is difficult for people to adjust their regular schedules to participate. Sometimes we may not be able to offer choral music because of lack of participation.

The composition of our adult choirs varies from week to week. Members leave or take time off due to life changes and family needs –new babies, caring for aging parents, starting college or going on break, getting married, birthdays and anniversaries, work schedules, activities their children are involved in, extended travels, illness, surgery, or realignment of priorities. Not always having a core group of singers in each voice part makes it difficult to follow through with all the plans and preparations that we make for each occasion. How do we attract more participants in these two choirs to ensure stability? All our liturgical ministries experience similar challenges.

Lack of Spanish Propers – We would like to have the propers sung at the Spanish Mass, but the music is not available in Spanish, so we would have to write it. Also, because the choir learns by rote, it would be difficult for them to learn to sing a set of three new propers each week.

More Integration Needed - We would like to include more Spanish students in the Jubilate Deo Youth Schola, but their school schedule does not allow most of them to make it until after the 4pm class starts. Fortunately, many of the kids are learning the music in the Spanish choir, which includes all ages.

Serving different levels of students - How will we sustain more than one teaching track in the youth schola, with limited number of teachers and preparation time? Next year this will become an issue, as some kids will need to move on to the second year of the Ward method. How do we keep our experienced kids progressing, and still serve the beginners?

Acoustics - Filling the Basilica with the sound of our voices is a major challenge for our singers. It is a big space and once it is filled with people, our best vocal efforts get absorbed and cannot be fully manifest in the space so that people can hear and understand. This year we added a modest setup to amplify our voices through the church's sound system, but when our church is filled with people, this system does not always fulfill our expectations. We will continue to make adjustments toward the ideal of a full sound in our acoustically resonant church.

Aspirations for 2017 and Beyond

- Continue to **serve God through the liturgy**, including many sung feast day celebrations, and help the assembly engage more fully in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass. It is our hope that our sacred music program ministers to all who gather at the Basilica, as well as to the musicians themselves.
- Continue to align our liturgies with the ideals presented by the Church, including the USCCB
Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship
The revised *Rite of Marriage*
- Receive further training in the Catholic sacred music tradition, **continuing studies of the Ward method** next summer to help us prepare to serve multiple experience levels of students in the youth schola in future years.
- Expand the sacred music repertory of our Spanish choir and congregation to achieve a **fully sung Spanish Mass**, and to eventually allow closer collaboration on more parts of our bilingual Masses.
- Gradually develop a **set of simple propers to be sung at our Spanish Masses**, as this music has not yet been published in Spanish. Develop more cantors among the Spanish choir and train them and the choir to sing the Gregorian Psalm tones.
- Expand sacred music formation to **more of our Spanish-speaking youth** by teaching the RE students within their classes, not only within the Spanish Choir and the Jubilate Deo Youth Schola.
- Offer more **sung Vespers** services, as befits a basilica.

- Serve the community by **offering beauty and the fine arts** as a basilica is expected to do.

Continue to highlight sacred music in concerts by **excellent guest ensembles** – *Voci Virili* coming on **February 12**

Organ recital on **July 22**, and continued partnering with area organists and organ students

Sacred choral concert featuring our resident choirs – **November 11**

CSO chamber music concerts – The CSO is very interested in performing in the Basilica, but it would cost us a minimum of \$3000. We would like to find a way to afford this.

- Incorporate the sacred music **operational costs into our overall parish budget**, instead of the one-time grant that we are operating from now, so that we can sustain the program into the future.

I want to thank all those who provide leadership within our program, especially **Andrea Tierney, Debi Crabtree, Sister Esther, Sister Imelda**, and, of course, **Fr. Carter**, for their tireless service and assistance . On behalf of the leadership team, thank you to all our volunteers and fellow parishioners for your invaluable support.

St. Cecilia, patron saint of musicians, pray for us!