

**A RICHLY DIVERSE CHURCH:
EMBRACING THE GIFT, FACING THE CHALLENGE**

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My friend and mentor, Archbishop Patrick Flores of San Antonio, had a very busy Saturday going from meeting to meeting and from place to place. Towards the end of the day, he arrived at a church full of children. He forgot why he was there. He asked the children, “Do you know who I am?”, and they answered, “No!” He introduced himself to them and then he asked them why he was there, and again they said “No!” He pleaded with them, “Doesn’t *anyone* know why I am here?” Finally a little boy answered, “I know why you’re here,” and the archbishop said, “Tell me quick, why am I here?”, and the little boy said, “To take up a second collection!”

Why are we here? We are here, according to the program in your packet, TO REFLECT ON THE PASTORAL MUSICIAN’S CALL TO HELP BUILD BRIDGES BETWEEN CULTURES, PEOPLES, AND GENERATIONS, AND TO FORM COMMUNITIES OF PRAISE AND JUSTICE THAT SING A NEW WORLD!

The emphasis of my presentation this afternoon will be on the first part of the theme: to help you build bridges between cultures and peoples. I am glad there are people like yourselves who are anxious to build bridges rather than walls as is being proposed in my part of the world. We in the United States form a very unique Church with nationalities from all over the world who make it up. I sometimes refer to the diversity in our church as a “technicolor dreamcoat.” I

invite you now to put on that coat of many colors representing all the peoples of the world and proceed to sing a new world into being. We are diverse, but we have a lot in common. There is more that unites us than separates us. Song is one thing that every culture has.

PEOPLE SING

Let's sing, "*Cielito Lindo...*"

"Ay, ay, ay, ay, *canta y no llores, porque cantando se alegran, cielito lindo, los corazones.*"

This song is an invitation to go from crying to singing, from sadness to joy, from tears to laughter. The one singing this song knows that singing changes us, transforms us – it lifts us up when we are down. Singing, as you know and I know, has a dynamic power to move hearts. This is the *raison d'être* of music ministry. In spite of the burden of rehearsals and having to put up with musicians with whom we sing or play (Why can't they sing like me?), we keep on doing this ministry because we feel we are called. It has to be a vocation. And like any other vocation, you may not feel appreciated nor feel that you are doing anybody any good. But you are! Liturgy comforts, elevates, heals, points to the truth of Jesus Christ and his Kingdom. It changes hearts as we sang a while ago: "*porque cantando se alegran, cielito lindo, los corazones.*"

Let me say a few things about our singing nature, that which we all have in common.

Some people are always singing: during their work, driving here and there, on a bus or a plane, as they go about their daily lives. Some of us sing in silence. I do. I find myself singing to myself, especially when I am walking. Yesterday, as I was walking to board my plane, I found myself singing inside, "*O Magnum Mysterium.*" The beat of the song I sing corresponds to the cadence of my walking.

Music is all around us: in the noises of nature: in the rain, in thunder, in the flow of water, whether it ripples as in a brook or crashes on the sands of the seashore.

Animals sing, and they have rhythm too. Animals seem to express their feelings as we do. Crows seem upset. Loons express their melancholy. Then there are the mocking calls of the mockingbird. Whales sing too, their songs sound like a heavy lament. Cows seem to sing to one another, and that's how they communicate. They can also be very talkative. They have a lot to say.

I think donkeys and hyenas make fun of us in their noisemaking, and this is ironic, because as we laugh at them, they are probably laughing at us!

In the desert land where I live, we often hear the howling of coyotes at night; they are probably singing in praise of the moon!

Yes, there's music out there – always – the beat or rhythm is in the movement of the stars, the sun, the moon, and the planets. The order of days, nights, months, the seasons, all bespeak of the ordered song of creation. No wonder we've got rhythm. It's above us, it's under and all around. Our human singing imitates nature's song.

Where did our singing begin?

We probably heard, or in some way sensed – our mother's song when we were in her womb; for sure among the first words we heard were the soothing sweet lullabies.

There's always a song in my heart and in yours. We bring our human experience to liturgy: our talking, eating, drinking, our silence, and our gestures of friendship, love and unity. It is altogether fitting that we bring our music into our worship too; it is, after all, an intrinsic part of ourselves. Authentic music comes from the innermost core of our being.

We bring our songs to God and to the believing community. In the United States, because of the multi-cultural make-up of our Church, we bring music from dozens of cultures from around the globe. Indeed we do wear a technicolor dream coat! What we have as a wonderful gift is the globalization of song! This is something to celebrate.

Since Vatican II we have been blessed with a variety of vernacular music. We started in English with “Kumbaya” and “Michael Rode the Boat Ashore.” We took in what was the fad at the time: the music of hottenanny and the folk music of those first years of liturgical reform, and we thought it was cool. Actually, it was cool, that is not so hot.

We now have great sacred music, some of it for “high church,” with sheet music for every instrument. We use instruments from every section of an orchestra. We have at our disposal quality composition with intricate organ and brass instrument accompaniment, for example. We have come a long way from the guitar alone. We have developed accomplished musicians who can actually read music. We have excellent cantors and choir directors. “Music ministry” has entered common Catholic vocabulary.

But how can we – every group – sing its own songs and still be one? How can we bring to reality “*e pluribus unum?*” How do we celebrate the liturgy together? We usually solve the problem by having separate Masses for each group. We may schedule an English Mass, a Spanish Mass, a Portuguese Mass, one in Vietnamese and another in Filipino, or Tagalog, or Chinese. These are real situations in some of our cities and sections of our country, such as in California and other places. We have more and more parishes with not only two but more languages in which people worship. We know we are one body and one faith in the one Triune God, but don’t we sometimes feel that we are in ships passing each other in the night...or on Sunday morning? How is each group going to be ministered to with our music and how can each

group be incorporated, that is, brought into the Body of Christ? Isn't it imperative that we, at least on occasion, come together and form a more perfect union?

Communion is the ideal, the aim, of every parish; it necessarily has to be included in every parish mission statement. Wasn't this Jesus' most fervent prayer? "...that all may be one as you, Father, are in me, and I in you; I pray that they may be one in us, that the world may believe that you sent me..." (Jn. 17:21). We, at Mass, join our prayer to his: "In mercy unite all your children wherever they may be" (III Eucharistic Prayer). "By your Holy Spirit, gather all who share this one bread and one cup into the one body of Christ, a living sacrifice of praise" (IV Eucharistic Prayer).

The other day, a priest friend called from San Jose, California. His parish is multi-cultural with a strong presence of Hispanics and various Asian cultures. Last year they had two Easter vigils, one bilingual in Spanish and English, the other in Vietnamese. The vigils ended at 6:30 a.m. on Easter. The Vietnamese asked Father if they could have the Vietnamese vigil on Easter Sunday afternoon at 2:30 p.m., the time of their regularly scheduled Vietnamese Mass. My answer was that he could not have a vigil on any afternoon. My recommendation was that they have one Easter vigil and to use as much Vietnamese as possible, and then at the 2:30 Easter Sunday Mass, present the Vietnamese neophytes in their white robes to the rest of the Vietnamese community.

The solutions to these situations involve decision-making by those who plan and execute liturgy. The bases of these decisions include: 1) respect for each musical expression of faith; 2) the acceptance of each expression as valid; 3) the intention to serve the worship needs of every group in the community; and 4) the willingness of every group to do its part to contribute to the unity of the whole. It takes good will on the part of everyone. We're all in this together.

Allow me to suggest a few avenues:

1. Bilingual (or tri-lingual) music. Thanks to contemporary composers, we have at our disposal some very fine bi- and multi-lingual music. It works. Even before Vatican II we used English, Latin, Greek, and Hebrew in the same Mass. In our diocese we only have to contend with two languages, so the problem is solved with relative ease. Not that we don't have our struggles. Too much of what is happening in the world, in American society, has crept into the life of the Church. Look at the immigration issue, for example. The same anger, fear, suspicion, and rejection in our country can be found, unfortunately, among some of our people in Church. An example is the xenophobic attitude that it seems has always been with us. In the time of Abraham Lincoln, before the Civil War, and before he became president, the Know-Nothing groups espoused the idea that the Declaration of Independence should be re-written to read "all men are created equal, except negroes, and foreigners, and Catholics." Recent immigrants are blamed for unemployment, escalated healthcare, and education costs. Singing together is a step to the discovery of the mystery of another culture, a step to *communio*, the call to be one.

2. Most of the time it works for each language group to have its own Mass. Where the challenge comes in is at the great solemnities of the Church year, when it is proper to bring everyone together. This takes good planning and practice. I would think that the Triduum, including the Easter Vigil, Pentecost, Corpus Christi devotions, parish patronal feasts and Christmas would be celebrated with all groups together. I have been at bishops' ordinations and installations where each language group takes its turn leading the singing, but even then, there are moments when all sing together.

3. John F. Burke suggests a format that he has found worthwhile and that might be helpful to those facing a bilingual challenge – have both the English and Spanish choirs meet on the same evening, and intentionally overlap part of the two rehearsals so the choirs get to work together on a regular basis. He started this practice a few summers ago, and he has found that it pays great dividends, both in terms of increasing the bilingual repertoire of both groups and in fostering Christian community across cultural and linguistic cultural lines.

In his own words, “Since the choirs started spending at least part of their practice time together, they have been able to get to know each other very well. Once choir members start developing personal relationships with each other, it is amazing how quickly language and cultural barriers dissipate.”

What Dr. Burke has been doing in Houston is most timely in a political atmosphere which has turned so poisonous with talk about building walls to close our southern border. We are called as the Mexican and U.S. bishops state in *Welcoming the Stranger* (2000) and *Strangers No Longer* (2003), to find dignified ways to interact with the stranger. In 1994 the bishops of the Archdiocese of Galveston-Houston, in their letter, *Many Members, One Body*, stated, “We cannot be content with diverse cultures simply co-existing at a respectful distance. The catholicity of the Church demands that these diverse cultures engage one another in conversation and extended social and liturgical interaction” (No. 26).

All of this reminds us that music ministry isn’t just for the enhancement and attraction of our liturgies, but that they are also called to be engaged in bringing down barriers between peoples and creating bridges that lead to greater unity. Your job as music ministers can help convince the rest of the Church and the world that it is possible, that in spite of diversity, we can be at one with one another.

4. In preparation for the celebration of the Third Millennium, the U.S. Bishops held *Encuentro 2000*. The theme was, “Many Faces in God’s House” and brought together a wide variety of representatives of the many cultures that make up the U.S. Church. The main thing that happened at the *Encuentro* was a sharing of peoples’ stories and a process leading to a celebration of reconciliation. It brought to mind that every culture, every people has its Exodus story and its own valley of tears. We heard the story, for example, of an African American woman religious who shared that when her mother was gravely ill, the community that she joined, who ran a hospital would not take in her mother because she was Black. They finally found a closet where they were able to house her. Then there was the story of a Catholic Native American woman who spoke of her anger at Christianity because years ago she heard the story of a tribe that was completely annihilated in Colorado. The order for the genocide was given by a Christian minister.

Listening to one another’s stories can be very effective in bringing people together. In our parishes we need to promote these kinds of events. You can find the description of the *Encuentro* process at: <http://www.usccb.org/hispanicaffairs/sessions.shtml>.

Singing together is but a means towards something much more profound, and that is the discovery of the mystery of the other. The richness of each culture can be reached through heart-to-heart conversation and interaction.

5. Last spring 30,000 people gathered in Los Angeles for the annual Catechetical Congress. One of the keynote speakers was Fr. Timothy Radcliffe, O.P., who spoke about the need for dialogue in the Church. In his speech he pointed to two categories of thinkers in the Catholic Church today. He called one group the “Kingdom Catholics” and the other “Communion Catholics.” Kingdom Catholics are “those who have a deep sense of the church as

the pilgrim people of God on the way to the Kingdom. The theologians who have been central to this tradition have been people like Karl Rahner and the Dominicans Edward Schillebeecks and Gustavo Gutierrez. This tradition stresses openness to the world, finding the presence of the Holy Spirit working outside Church, freedom and the pursuit of justice. They became very much identified with a publication called *Concilium*.”

Communion Catholics are those who “feel the urgent need to rebuild the inner life of the Church. Theologians like Hans von Balthasar and the-then Joseph Ratzinger represent this way of thinking. Their theology often stressed Catholic identity, was wary of too hardy an embrace of modernity, and they stressed the cross. They had their publication, too. It was called *Communio*.”

Father Radcliffe points to the difference in the words of consecration and applies that difference to these two theologies. The words over the bread and over the wine differ slightly. “The bread is given to the disciples with the words, ‘This is my body, given for you.’ The sharing of Christ’s body gathers the community together around the altar. This is the community of Christ’s small band of friends, who have shared his life and now his death. But the cup of wine is blessed for ‘you and for all,’ as it says in the Eucharist. This is the cup that Jesus will not drink again until the Kingdom. He looks forward for when the whole community will be gathered into communion in Christ.”

He goes on to say that the sharing of the bread is *centripetal*, for it gathers us into the community of Christ’s friends and disciples. “It is a sign of that interior life of the Church which is so crucial for Communion Catholics.” The cup of wine, on the other hand, is *centrifugal*. “It expresses that outward thrust which is important for Kingdom Catholics, the reaching out to all

humanity, ready to find the Holy Spirit working in all people.” He says that this is a healthy tension and involves a “double rhythm.” It gathers in and reaches out. “It is like breathing.”

Father Radcliffe urges dialogue in the Church along the lines of the Catholic Common Ground Initiative begun by Cardinal Joseph Bernardin. Cardinal Bernardin wanted to create a space for dialogue in which the different groups within the Church could talk to each other, converse, live together, share the same faith, and celebrate their common ground. I believe that the principles of dialogue involved in common ground are essential for a healthier liturgical life in the Church. If we have differences about the liturgy, then we need to sit down and talk about them.

I wish to point out that the most important element in dialogue and conversation is *listening*. Listening is the greatest gift that we can give to each other in communication. It is the first rule of any kind of communication. It is risky because we may change our minds about something.

I would like to say a word about the different age groups, or the inter-generational make-up of the church. We must, at all costs, convince the senior in our midst that they are most valuable in the life of the Church. Their accumulated wisdom needs to be utilized and appreciated. Invite them to baptismal and confirmation preparation sessions. Invite them to tutor young people in our schools. Invite them to volunteer for the myriad ministries that abound in modern parishes. Organize dialogue sessions where the seniors can share their stories and viewpoints, and where the young can also speak of their way of thinking to seniors. This can lead to a mutual enrichment opportunity.

I wish to close with a story that I heard the other day. A friend of mine, Fr. Wally Platt, a fellow Basilian, shared this example. “A glove in and by itself is no good at all, except perhaps

for swatting flies. But if I were to put my hand into it, my hand filling every part of it, giving it form and substance, potential and usefulness-then it does, indeed, become really what it is. So it is with us in God. We are the glove on the hand of God. He is the one who gives us form and life; he is the one who acts through us; our being is realized, vitalized by the Spirit of God. Without him we are formless, useless, dead. With him we are enlivened to know, to love, and to serve.” And I add, “to sing.”