

# VESTRY PAPERS

To Encourage and Guide Those Called by God to Lead Episcopal Congregations



## Music and Worship: Dancing before the Lord

by Monte Mason

It has often seemed to me that clergy, vestries and congregations miss a crucial way of thinking about their worship life: that the primary and fundamental teaching tool of the Episcopal Church is its weekly liturgies.

Out of our liturgies we learn the roots of our Anglican spirituality, and our corporate prayer life teaches what is most important about why we worship together. Christian education -- i.e. Christian formation through liturgy -- then is first. Not Sunday School, youth events, EFM, prayer circles, or choirs. While they are important, they serve only to further develop those aspects of spirituality that are first and best taught through liturgy.

A congregation's spiritual life and growth is tightly bound with its musical expression, and it is axiomatic that however the music goes, so goes the prayer life. When the value of music in church is either deflated, ignored or willfully subjugated to "more important

social concerns" -- such as factors of service length, we-don't-like-that-kind-of-music, add your own to this list -- prayer itself is diminished and the spiritual life of a community is deeply compromised.

### Participating in the sacred teachings

Of all the days of the week, the greatest number of people willingly take a Sunday morning to walk through church doors. They do this to participate in the sacred teachings. If this is so, then Sunday School, Bible study, etc. serve and enrich far fewer. Yet, and this is the important part, these lesser educational tools are often seen to drive and give direction to our major Sunday liturgies.

What this means is that an outreach program might easily set its goal(s) quite apart from the Christian formation inherent of an Anglican spiritual identity, or a church choir  
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*Passionate. Glorious. Evocative. Music stirs the soul, both in times of profound joy and deep mourning. These pages of Vestry Papers explore ways in which vestries can both reflect on and provide leadership in this key area of parish life.*

## More Voices at the Table

by the Rev. Bruce Jenneker

*Editor's note: We asked the Rev. Bruce Jenneker to give us a report on the work of the Standing Commission for Liturgy and Music.*

The Catechism at the back of *The Book of Common Prayer* reminds us that "the mission of the Church is to restore all people to unity with God and each other in Christ." (p. 855) This work of restoration, reconciliation and reunion is accomplished in many ways, foremost among them being church's worship.

As we sing together, our hearts are lifted into God's presence. As we wail for our losses and

give voice to the fears that grip us, we discover that we are moving through the darkness into a marvelous light. As we make our vows and utter our petitions, grace which finds us everywhere finds us again, and we savor the wonder of being found. In our worship, the universe of which we are a part, all the people who share life with us, and the God who made it all in love, are all thrown into bold relief and engaging intimacy:

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# More Voices at the Table

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*Now the heart forgiven leaping  
Now the Spirit's visitation  
Now the Son's epiphany  
Now God gives the blessing  
Now Now Now*

(from Hymn 333 in *Hymnal 1982*;  
words by Jaroslav J. Vajda (alt.)

## **Caring for the church's worship**

The Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music is the hand of the General Convention that cares for the church's worship. Directed by the will of the Church expressed through the actions of the General Convention, the SCLM is responsible for development of the liturgies the Church uses and the provision of the music it sings. The SCLM examines proposals for the inclusion of exemplary women and men in the Calendar. It considers the shape and content of the lectionary, proposing which lessons of Scripture are read on which Sundays and Holy Days.

The Commission consists of sixteen people appointed by the Presiding Bishop and the President of the House of Deputies: eight lay-people (four who especially represent musical concerns and expertise) four priests and four bishops. It meets six times during the triennium as it does the work required by the Resolutions of General Convention that have been referred to it, and prepares to write its report and recommendations for *The Blue Book*. The Report of the Commission becomes the basis for the work of the General Convention Committee on Prayer Book, Liturgy and Music that prepares the Resolutions which are debated by the Convention.

## **Gathering data**

During this triennium the Commission is gathering data from parishes, ministries and communities to help the General Convention to *define the scope of a plan to enrich and renew the liturgical life of our Church*. The Commission has been inviting to each of its meetings a particular group of people to join it for dinner and conversation – including seniors, Asian Americans, Latinos, Generation X folks. Future plans include meetings with

Black and Native American Episcopalians. The intention is to bring 'more voices to the table' as we reflect on the significance of liturgical life and the vision for our future.

## **Holy people, holy worship**

Other projects that the Commission will be working on in this triennium include re-searching the people proposed for inclusion in the Calendar -- C. S. Lewis, Janani Lulwum, Festo Kinvengere, Philander Chase, William Temple, preparing supplemental liturgical materials for burial and for marriage, developing liturgies to support the planting and growth of new congregations, exploring the issues involved in inculturation and the challenges of creating worship experiences that are multi-cultural, multi-generational, multi-lingual and use contemporary multi-media resources.

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*As we wait for our losses and give  
voice to the fears that grip us, we  
discover that we are moving through  
the darkness into a marvelous light.*

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The Commission hopes to present to the General Convention when it meets in Minneapolis in 2003 supplemental musical resources including music for worship with children and service music book which will include several new settings of music for the celebration of the Holy Eucharist.

The Office of Liturgy and Music and the Rev. Dr. Clayton Morris, Staff Officer, supports the work of the Commission. For more information about the Commission on Liturgy and Music please be in touch with either of the Co-chairs, the Rt. Rev. Jeffery Rowthorn or the Rev. Bruce W. B. Jenneker, or Dr. Morris.

*The Rev. Bruce W.B. Jenneker is the Co-Chair on the Commission on Liturgy and Music, and the Associate Rector for Worship and Christian Formation at Trinity Church, Copley Square, Boston, Massachusetts.*

*Did you know? In 99%  
of Episcopal parishes  
and missions, the  
Eucharist is central  
to the life of the  
congregation.*

*The Zacchaeus Report  
Cornerstone, 1999*

# The Call of the Sacred Musician

by the Rev. Victoria Sirota

How do you describe the call of the sacred musician? Some people know from early on that this is their true identity; others fall into a church or temple position quite surprisingly. No matter how you find yourself to be employed as a sacred musician, there comes a time when it may be helpful, or even vital for you to claim this "calling" as part of who you are... You have discovered that making music on sacred ground makes you happier than anything else on earth in the deepest place of your soul.

...The level of self-discipline is huge. There is never enough practice time. Repertoire needs to be worked on quickly and used weekly. In addition to knowledge of organ and choral repertoire, service music, and different liturgical settings and styles, the musician needs to understand and oversee the repair and tuning of organs and pianos, stay connected with the needs of the congregation, placate and inspire the choirs – all working at different performing levels, as well as attend meetings with clergy and staff. Why would anyone choose this willingly?

Because you feel called. Because when you accompany the hymn and everyone is singing God's praises together, you are filled with emotion. Because you are struck time and again by how miraculous it is that this ordinary volunteer choir can sound so extraordinary. Because you love the profound silence that fills the room when the last notes of a great composition are sent heavenward. Because nothing makes you feel more alive.

So, if you are called by the Holy of Holies to be a musician in the House of the Lord, then why is the job so difficult? Why is there often tension with the clergy and problems with the choir and congregation?

Remember that Satan is never very far from where God is. You cannot work for God and expect to avoid spiritual warfare. Read the prophets. Read the laments of Jeremiah. Even Jesus was tempted by Satan. The early apostles struggled mightily as they proclaimed the good news.

Anyone who works in sacred space can expect the assault. Do not be surprised. And do not be so naive as to think that you are somehow above the battle. What musicians, clergy, wardens, elders and laity have in

common are struggles with ego and idolatry, the need to be in control and the need to have power..

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***Anyone who works in sacred space can expect the assault. Do not be surprised.***

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How can you personally deal with evil? Know yourself. Get counseling, therapy or spiritual direction as necessary. You need to be able to process your difficulties and struggles, your life scars and anger with a neutral party who can help you see where you are at fault and where you are not. Once you begin to understand better the forces with which you are operating, you will know how to pray. You will also better understand whether this particular job remains the place to which God is calling you. Calls are always time sensitive. Sometimes it is simply time to move on...

If you are able to acknowledge your own weaknesses, you will become more tolerant of others. We are all human. God does not expect us to be perfect, but rejoices when we are faithful – when we have the courage to ask for forgiveness and return to the fold.

Working for God means part of your call is to do battle with evil – not necessarily evil people, but evil ideas and thoughts, that which despises beauty and creativity – and stand up for what is good, right and true. Therefore, do not forget to protect yourself. In the words of Ephesians 6:10-13 (NRSV):

*Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his power. Put on the whole armor of God, so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil...*

May you claim your calling as a sacred musician with courage and joy. And may God bless you richly for this life's offering.

*The Rev. Dr. Victoria R. Sirota is Chaplain to the American Guild of Organists and Rector of the Church of the Holy Nativity, Baltimore, Maryland. Excerpts reprinted with permission from The American Organist®, October 2001, The American Guild of Organists.*



*O God, whom saints and angels delight to worship in heaven: Be ever present with your servants who seek through art and music to perfect the praises offered by your people on earth...*

*The Book of Common Prayer, page 819*

# Conflict: Inevitable or Avoidable?

by the Rev. Lindsay Hardin Freeman

Talk to any parish priest. Talk to any church musician. Chances are both have been embroiled, or have friends who have been embroiled, in a clergy/organist conflict.

While the canons clearly state that the final authority of music matters lie in the hands of the rector/vicar, that same canon mandates the priest to draw on the talents of people skilled in music.

*...the Member of the Clergy shall have final authority in the administration of matters pertaining to music...the Member of the Clergy shall seek assistance from persons skilled in music. Together they shall see that music is appropriate to the context in which it is used.* (Title II, Canon 5, Constitution and Canons)

## It can be a battlefield

But therein lies the potential conflict, says Rodney Ayers, Director of Music at St. Matthew's in Wilton, Connecticut. Citing multiple horror stories, he knows that "it can be a battlefield."

From the musician's side, the horror stories can include summary dismissal by a new rector, exceedingly low pay scales, or having to work under a cleric who is neither understanding nor appreciative of music in general.

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***Because we have so much passion for music, there is great potential for conflict.***

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From the clergy side, an equally negative list: organists who insist on strict control of the music and content, those who gossip about the Rector or build power bases, those who bypass clergy to approach vestries directly for pay raises.

Such negative occurrences cannot help but be felt in the congregation, says the Rev. Victoria Sirota, chaplain to the American Guild of Organists and both a priest and musician. "If the clergy can't get along with the organist or vice versa, it is very hard (for the congregation) to sing God's praises."

## There are no secrets

Like a family – and many liken congregations to one large family system – it becomes obvious if anger or hostility is operative behind the scenes. "There are no secrets in parish life," says one rector.

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***If the primary lay/clergy relationship i.e. rector and organist, is not working, you've got problems.***

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Against the backdrop of the clergy/lay relationship lies the broader memories of parishioners and the powerful feelings that music evoke, says Ann Hallisey, former Rector at Church of the Ascension in Vallejo, California and Director of Cornerstone. "Music is a core expression of our souls and can build bridges or blow them up."

## Avoiding pitfalls

What can the vestry do about such conflict? How can it help avoid such pitfalls? From a variety of clergy and musicians interviewed for this article, here are some suggestions:

- Know the canons for staff responsibilities.
- Have several people on the vestry who understand music and the music program of the parish.
- Consider a vestry retreat that focuses on the music ministry in the context of the larger vision of the parish.
- Recognize choir members periodically and the time they give.
- Encourage the staff to pray together. Pray for them as they pray for the parish.
- Support choir events.
- Encourage interaction between the musician and congregation. Review benefit packages, including continuing education opportunities for musicians.
- Refer conflicts to a personal committee at the rector's discretion.
- Make sure the music program complements the spirituality of the community.

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*When in our music  
God is glorified, and  
adoration leaves no  
room for pride, it is  
as though the whole  
creation cried*

*Alleluia! Alleluia!*

*420, Hymnal 1982,  
words by F. Pratt Green*

# Conflict: Inevitable or Avoidable?

*continued from page 4*

## The spirituality of the community

Scott Helferty, rector of Grace Church in New Bedford, Massachusetts, believes making sure the music fits the spirituality of a particular community makes a significant difference. "The most successful music programs that we know of are the ones where the musician can communicate

something of his or her spirituality and where that dynamic merges with the energy of the congregation. Otherwise, the organist can be perceived only as making 'professional' music, and that is an inevitable tension point."

*Lindsay Hardin Freeman is the editor of Vestry Papers and a parish priest.*



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*Sing to the Lord with  
the harp, with the  
harp and the voice  
of song.*

*With trumpets and the  
sound of the horn,  
shout with joy  
before the King,  
the Lord.  
Psalm 98:6-7*

# Musicians for Small Congregations

*by Carol Doran*

Whenever we take time to imagine the ways our parish could flourish 'if only' this or that about it were changed, we are taking the first step towards realizing that dream. When the 'if only' includes a fresh vision of the church's music program, you are in the company of hundreds of musicians, clergy and other worship leaders across the country who participate in **The Leadership Program for Musicians Serving Small Congregations (LPM)**.

The program is locally administered and taught by the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, and is intended to support the worship life of our church's smallest congregations.

More than forty such LPM groups meet currently throughout the United States, using course materials and organizational structure provided by LPM's national Board, and led by local coordinators – usually chosen by their bishops – who are prepared by participating in one of the program's summer national Leadership Conferences.

Local LPM groups typically gather one Saturday each month for two years to develop the musician's skills and knowledge.

Participants benefit from personal and professional connections, which offer continuing support after they have completed the course requirements and been awarded their Presiding Bishop's Certificate in Church Music. The intent is to send these musicians back to their congregations with increased musical and liturgical skills, and a greater sense of self-worth as lay ministers.

Courses include: leadership of congregational song (organ, guitar, voice, piano), hymnody, worship, voice training for choirs and conducting, teaching new music, resources for effective music ministry, and philosophy of church music.

The Evangelical Lutheran Church became a full LPM partner in 1999, and many local programs now include members of both denominations on their planning boards.

To learn about the program nearest you contact: Marti Rideout at (703) 250-6757, e-mail: [martirideout@juno.com](mailto:martirideout@juno.com), or [www.lpm-online.org](http://www.lpm-online.org).

*Carol Doran serves on the music and liturgy faculty of The Virginia Theological Seminary and is a member of the LPM Board.*



# Music and Worship

*continued from page 1*

easily sing too many lovely masses at the expense of engaging the congregation in beautifully sung hymnody. The spiritual development of a congregation as a whole is thus devalued, and budgets become bloated for the sake of show and pride.

## Music as a building tool of spirituality

If we look instead at music as a chief building tool of spirituality, we discover that in terms of teaching, the sung Word is in fact more efficacious of learning than the spoken Word. (The reader must now pause a moment to observe the gasps from many theologians and clergy, while searching for the knowing nods from church musicians everywhere.)

Let's think about it. Memory retention is greatly enhanced through text applied to music. Further, text is more easily learned in strophic verse form. What average ten-year old child could quote entire Bible passages about the birth of Jesus? Yet that same child could easily quote the song, *Silent Night*. This is Christian education. What person, suddenly, singing a hymn learned in childhood, cannot immediately recall its spiritual importance? This is continuity and enhancement, a further but more sophisticated level of retention.

One of the greatest educational tools of Christian liturgy is in teaching concept and metaphor. If we were to take the singing of *Silent Night* within such terms, we would have to consider at least the following – the physical act of singing, printing or transmission of text, the text itself, the story of the work's composition, the meaning of the text, the building and community in which it is sung, how it is being sung, and the Christian spirituality and tradition in which all is grounded.

*Silent Night*, the simplest of carols, becomes suddenly and affectionately more complicated, for it encompasses the congregational act of putting it all together and making liturgy work. This is often what is known as art, and our Christianity, informed through Anglicanism, has called such an act beautiful and worthy of our attention.

## Questions for Vestries

Our liturgies must therefore hold fast to the re-recreation of God's beauty. Music is a primary tool whereby this is experienced, learned, and appreciated. While music and liturgy committees are formed to better serve the prayer life of a parish, vestries can and should apply some diagnostic tools to better serve their congregation's identity as a living Christian member. Of course there are many more such questions, but these are enough to get some lively discussion going:

- *How do the Sunday liturgies inform the community of the faithful?*
- *It is widely understood that they do, and if not, what prevents this understanding?*
- *Does the normative style of Sunday worship inform the program life of your parish?*
- *How does the music selection "flavor" your congregation's worshiping style?*
- *Is the music selection reflective of deep tradition and core spiritual values?*
- *Does the congregation live among any sectarian musical agendas and if so, how is the spiritual life of your parish affected?*

## The ultimate creative act

It is my Christian duty to explain that liturgists and theologians are fond of indicating that liturgy is defined as "work of the people." Indeed, this is so, but I would rather view it as a living experience, an endeavor whereby we are left open to hear God's Word and our Christian spirituality thereby continually educated and informed. Good liturgy and music is therefore the ultimate creative act that, like David, dances before the Lord. Vestries need only to attach their receptors, move their feet, and check it out for themselves.

*Monte Mason is a member of the Standing Commission on Liturgy and Music and Worship; Organist and Choir Director for St. Martin's-by-the-Lake, Minnetonka Beach, Minnesota; and Founding Director of The Gregorian Singers.*

*"A Christian should be a head to foot Alleluia."*

*St. Augustine*



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