



National Association of Pastoral Musicians

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Keynote Address – Steven C. Warner

Let me tell you a story.

Every year on Mother's Day, the Notre Dame Folk Choir presents a very important concert off-campus. We bring along our repertoire, our instruments, our music, and our selves to a venue about an hour away. We set up in the auditorium and prepare to offer our songs to the assembly.

But this is no ordinary concert.

In order to sing at this venue, we must pass through four levels of metal detectors, electronic security gates and armed guards. Though my choir doesn't know this particular detail, within a hundred yards of where we sing is an attic, filled with discarded statues of saints, all shrouded with old blankets – and in the center of the room is a broken statue of Mary, the Mother of God. Ironically, she stands watch over another, more worldly construct: a chair – the old electric chair from death row. This woman has been used to standing next to human inventions of torture since she first stood at the foot of the Cross.

The place we sing on Mother's Day is Indiana State Prison, in Michigan City, Indiana. It is a level-four incarceration unit, which means it also houses "death row." Every year we offer a concert to the offenders there – and, via closed circuit TV, to the men on death row as well.

Last year, when we came to sing at the prison, an unexpected and rather traumatic thing happened during our concert. Halfway through the program, after an intermission with cheap punch and cookies shared by the choir and the offenders, we gathered to sing the second half of our concert. Mid-song, an armed prison guard stepped between me and the assembly, and announced to all five hundred of the men: "Get back to your cells. NOW. The head count is off. The concert is over."

What happened in the next two minutes is hard to describe, but I'll offer a short attempt. The offenders began shouting violently at the guard. In a heartbeat, the tension level soared in the room. My students, especially first-time visitors, looked downright deer-in-the-headlights fearful.

I stepped up to the microphone, taking it away from the guard (only later did I find out how dangerous that could've been). And I said to the men: "It's alright, gentlemen. If you have to leave, we'll sing you out of the auditorium. Don't worry. We'll see you next year."

The men now began offering benedictions of "God bless you" and "Thank you for coming!" as they dejectedly left the auditorium and headed back to their prison blocks.

Driving home, the choir unpacked this experience in our various cars. What came out of that conversation was a remarkable insight: Before the intrusion by the guard, not one of my students felt any fear being in the presence of the prisoners. We had visited this place for more than a decade, and the men, I know, loved this opportunity to meet with our ensemble. They wouldn't dare blow it: they are always on their absolute best behavior. They bring their Bibles to our concert, many of them openly weeping, and during the intermission they share stories with our students about their hopes to continue their own education, redeem themselves, look for hope.

The fear – came from the guard, the man with the gun. But more frightening than the weapon: here was one who could not enter into the compassion of the songs we were singing. The fear came from one whose heart was hardened. And to this – the hardening of the heart – I will return as I conclude my address with you today. A hardened heart is a dangerous thing.

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There was great wisdom, I believe, when the Convention Core Committee put together the logo for this year's NPM meeting. The folks in Indianapolis chose not only a beautiful design, but a wonderful teaching tool as well. You'll see it on t-shirts throughout the week: the design of a maze, circular in shape, with all paths eventually winding their way to the Cross of Christ.

Now I'm not sure if everyone knows the subtle naming of these ancient walkways. In his book *The Spirituality of Mazes and Labyrinths*, Gailand MacQueen makes this distinction. A *labyrinth*, such as what would be found in Chartres Cathedral in France or Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, is a relatively simple path. All one has to do is patiently follow a single course, thereby reaching the center. The walking is quiet, deliberate, with no need to entertain any decision-making along the way. And that, in and of itself, is a valuable exercise!

But a *maze* is different! In a maze, wrong turns can be made. Switchbacks, dead ends and false leads can occur. You can appear painfully close to the center, make a seemingly well-intentioned decision that looks perfectly reasonable from your perspective – only to be led further away from the center as your decision plays itself out.

To the Indy NPM chapter: thank you for providing such a teaching tool at the outset of these precious days together! You chose what appears to be *maze*, not a labyrinth; and in doing so you also chose to illustrate that we, too, can make both wise and ill-advised turns. Music making is not like walking a labyrinth, where no decision need be made except placing one foot in front of another. We, too, can make seemingly well-informed decisions that ultimately lead us away from our goal. My hope is that, as our time unfolds this week – as we sing, as we share, as we discuss, and especially as we pray together – we will be able to compare our own journeys through the maze of expressions that embody the church today.

And so, keeping this image before us, let me begin the discussion with what this talk addresses: "...the song of Christ's story forms a people and gathers them into one Body." And I am to answer at least one question: "How do we engage the generations yet to come in this life-giving song?"

What kind of song are we leaving to generations yet to come?

How do we pass that inheritance along?

And how does a maze fit into this inheritance? What brings us closer to the core, what misdirects us, and what's at the center of our efforts, anyway?

One more note as we begin the discussion of how – and what – inheritance is passed to our next generations. You will not hear me making *recommendations* for specific songs (or, for that matter, songs from specific publishers). I will use some songs to illustrate my examples. But today's purpose is not to put together an "A-list" of specific compositions, much less composers. Such would be, I am convinced, a wrong turn, a dead end in the maze.

Nor will you hear me advocate a particular *style* of music as being better than another. Our faith communities, particularly in America, are as diverse as any in the world. To make judgments about the worthiness of songs based on their *genre* would also, I feel, be a false direction in our maze. Some might accuse me of abandoning my own choir's *modus operandi* by saying this: I'm in charge of a *FOLK* choir, right? But really, the Notre Dame Folk Choir's name (as I have explained for many years) is not about advocating a *style* of music. (Although my friends swear there are two trinities at work in my world; the first is, of course, the Father, Son and Spirit – and the second being Peter, Paul, and Mary!)

But no, the "Folk" in the choir's name references a *vision*, not a genre. It is the vision of a repertoire that, by and large, is the property of the assembly. It is a vision, a "job description," of the choir as leaven, and of the singing assembly – the "folks," if you will – as the natural extension of the choir. That vision cannot be contained in one, or even a handful, of musical styles.

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As I've prepared for this talk over the past year, I've shared a quote with some of my fellow music-makers. The quote is this: "People nowadays go to church to be entertained and to the theatre to be edified." When I've asked my listeners to guess the author, the responses have ranged from Marty Haugen to Jay Leno, from Cardinal McCarrick to Chicago choirmaster Richard Proulx. All guesses were wrong – and from the wrong century. (I'll let you all ponder this for a moment, before yielding the answer).

It's an interesting remark: *People nowadays go to church to be entertained and to the theatre to be edified*. By way of illustration: when my son Nathan, who lives in the Big Apple, saw the musical "Wicked" for the first time, he called me up and said, "Dad, my

heart was changed. Everything I had thought of this woman – the Wicked Witch – was turned around.”

His *heart* was changed. Turned around and converted. And the *theatre* did that! Now, maybe you’ve seen this musical, too. Maybe you, too, found something inside you change as you listened to the songs and heard the story of the ostracized woman with her strange and alienating complexion.

What’s at work here? Why does edification sometimes take place in theatres and not in our own sacred spaces? From “The Lion King” to “Les Mis,” I constantly encounter people whose hearts have been touched and changed by “going to a show.” So, National Pastoral Musicians, I ask you a question: Aren’t we ultimately about the business of edification, of changing hearts? Shouldn’t that be one of the strongest goals unifying our efforts?

Now about the quote: “People nowadays go to the church to be entertained and to the theatre to be edified...” It was actually written in 1895, by the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard.

My conjecture is this: *Edification takes place when we are true to the story of redemption. And entertainment happens when the story is only about “me.”* As we sing our songs and tell our story, whose story are we telling? Are we telling our own? Or are we telling the story of the One who calls us together in the first place?

Let me illustrate the above dialectic – entertainment and edification – with two images, incongruous though they might seem. Remember Carol Channing as the inimitable Dolly Levi in “Hello, Dolly”? Remember her grand entrance, as adoring minions sang the title song? It was “all about Carol,” and no one else. And, as Ethel Merman would accurately state in another song: “THAT’S ENTERTAINMENT!” Hollywood can at least be honest with itself once in a while.

But here’s another image, one that we as Catholics easily comprehend. It’s an Icon of Mary, the Mother of God. Notice what Mary does when she is represented in an icon: as lovely and captivating as her picture might be, she diverts your attention elsewhere. She always points to another – to Jesus the Christ. It is not about her. *She is being true to the story*, by pointing to another. No matter how glorious the icon, she always points elsewhere. Not to herself. Her role is to illustrate the glory of her Son.

As we do the work of pastoral ministry, wherever we work, a choice soon presents itself in the pathway of our maze. Two paths diverge – upon one, we tell the story of *ourselves*. On the other, we tell the *story of Christ*. It is only when we give ourselves, utterly, sacrificially and convincingly, over to telling the story of Jesus the Christ that we can *achieve conversion and edification of the heart*.

And this brings us closer to the center of the maze. It is no switchback or dead end, no false lead. We must tell the story of Christ. The song we pass along to future generations must not be about *us*. It must point to someone else: the person of Jesus Christ.

In similar manner, all of us who engage in this great liturgical drama – our cantors, soloists, instrumentalists, presiders – all must be completely willing to sacrifice the telling of our own story in order to tell the story of Jesus the Christ. This is one of the principal truths we must pass along in song to our next generation. It is not about us. It is not our song. It must be Christ's song.

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This giving of ourselves over to Christ's story, and not our own, is not an easy task in our contemporary society. And I'd like to use two examples to illustrate this.

The first illustration: whether we like it or not, one of the most popular shows in our country is *American Idol*. It's come to be THE place where young and old witness how our music and our talent is transmitted in our culture. In the unfolding weekly drama, people try to keep the spotlight utterly focused on their own unique talents. *It's all about the performer.*

But in telling the story of Christ, we have to reject the business of being an American idol – and in doing so, reject how some of our musical culture is transmitted. For our purpose is to be an American icon, not idol – pointing to someone else, not to ourselves. One of these choices leads us down a path that is true. The other is a virtual dead end. Which pointing, which decision, which path, will we hand along to future generations? Do our musicians know that they need to be icons, so that members of the assembly can see the face of Christ – not the face of a performer – calling them to prayer? Can we mentor our musicians to do such a magnificent thing? **This** aspect of pointing beyond ourselves is a critical part of the song we need to leave the next generation.

Here is a second illustration concerning the handing down of our story in song: Picture the 2006 Super Bowl – now, I come from a place where sporting events are routinely elevated to the status of quasi-religious celebrations. So here it is: tens of thousands of people attended this secular, almost cultic event, and millions more watched at home. Now, let me ask you something: Could *you* join along with Aretha Franklin and Aaron Neville on the National Anthem? There is an extreme individualism that has become symptomatic of our society, and it has silenced the throngs in the singing of our nation's one song, again, in the name of entertainment. The song of the assembly is eradicated in the name of vocal stylization (that is, musical individualism) – and the result is a mute assembly. It seems as though the more we prize entertainment and individual expression, the more we encounter a numbing silence. What has happened to the art of congregational singing in our country? It has been sacrificed upon the altar of the individual, and evangelized through the power of a media-driven pop culture.

We must be very aware of this culture, the atmosphere in which we work. We must make conscious decisions in what we choose to sing, and how we choose to sing it, such that all know the voice of the folk is an essential part of the experience. This

priority – that the assembly’s voice is a critical component in our song, is another part of the legacy we must assuredly hand down to those that follow.

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I would be remiss if some positive turns in our maze were ignored at this point.

For the past ten years I’ve attended the Composer’s Forum, which is graciously hosted by John Foley and his staff at St. Louis University’s Center for Liturgy. A lecturer in the early years (gratefully, I cannot remember who it was) ventured to say that in the past generation we have been saturated by too much new music, and that most of it was rather worthless. He suggested that we composers simply stop writing new material.

I’m not willing to accept that blunt observation. Let us turn back time for a moment, to 1967. That year, when I first picked up a guitar and listened to the music of one Mr. Joe Wise, we were on the threshold of a creative process seldom seen in church history. Had we taken the above words to heart: “we should stop writing new material,” we would never have experienced some of the compositions that have become mainstays of my own choir over the years. I simply cannot imagine doing Easter Sunday liturgy without hearing the over-the-top voices of my choir singing Christopher Walker’s “Out of Darkness”, resplendent with brass and strings:

“Let your sadness be no more! Christ has opened heaven’s door!

Death has no more pow’r to slay: This is resurrection day!”

Nor could I conceive of going through the liturgical year without invoking the lyrics of Marty’s beautiful Advent beckoning:

“For you O Lord, my soul in stillness waits; truly, my hope is in you.”

These, and countless other songs have catechized. They have inspired. They have formed and sustained vocations. They have blessed and launched sacramental unions. When I think back to 1975, as I actually began my own work in liturgical music, I can assuredly say we have more wondrous, articulate, theologically accurate, ethnically and spiritually and linguistically diverse ritual music available now than we’ve had at any point in the history of our church. And that process is not over. It never will be, thank God. Everything is made new: it is not a static process. It is a never-ending unfolding of the creative Spirit, a promise made to us by our Savior Son, ensuring the presence of that Holy Spirit in our lives and our work.

I approach this vast body of music, the work of exploring the repertoire that continues to be written, as a kind of “holy mining” – a profoundly rewarding sifting through all the tangible, creative enterprise of the Holy Spirit. What songs will best fit into the needs of our assembly? Which ones will move and challenge and inspire the choir, wherever they are in their ability? How do our images, colors and languages of God need to be stretched?

So then, we have a tremendous, emerging legacy of composition that continues to find its way into the hearts of our faithful. And that is a very positive direction in our maze!

But just as this diversity has blossomed in the years since the Second Vatican Council, so too have opinions toward this inventiveness. And in the recent exchange of opinions, here is, in my observation, a profound dead end.

Have you noticed, over recent years, that our society has become more and more intolerant of *differences* of opinion? The polarization that exists – indeed, is rampant – in politics, seems to have found its way into many corners of the church and society as well. Lately, it seems that after a brief sound bite, we casually affix one-dimensional labels to groups: “Neo-cons” and “liberals,” “hawks” and “doves.” The environmental world vs. the industrial world. “Lawyers” and “social workers”(!). Guitarists vs. organists. And above them all: LITURGISTS!

And after this naming, the polarization begins.

Where has the quest for common ground, gone? In all issues from the environment to global politics, from education to ecumenism, we seem to have fallen into the dead end of polarization. At one of the last regional meetings of NPM in Chicago, Dominican Jim Marchionda announced to the participants that we were experiencing an “age of arrogance.” He pointed out, quite accurately, that this arrogance was not merely confined to political structures – it had significantly permeated ecclesial ones as well.

An age of arrogance: as we approach our labors this week, shall we fall into this trap? Will we be known, by our actions and our songs and our words, as a “National Association of *Pastoral* Musicians,” or as a “National Association of *Partisan* Musicians”?

In musical circles, this partisan spirit has become rampant. One of my friends, Fr. Columba Kelly from St. Meinrad’s Archabbey, has observed: “the singing of chant has now become politicized!” And in many instances, this remark is sadly true. Can musicians creatively move outside their normal repertoires without creating a stink among the choir and assembly alike? With my own ensemble, in order to avoid this trap, I routinely and constantly mix genres and styles, deliberately attempting to find just the right place for everything: bilingual responses, African and African-American songs, Taizé ostinato chorales, contemporary compositions, traditional hymnody, Irish and Mexican and French sacred songs and, yes, both English plainchant and Gregorian chant! In the words of the challenging hymn text by Marty Haugen, “All Are Welcome.” We speak here not of just the overt welcome of the human person, but an even more profound gesture of hospitality: the welcome of the human person’s attempts to capture her own, his own, experiences in song. In this vision, the rich, pluralistic, diverse fabric of human expression becomes a normative thing.

If we are to move beyond this pervasive, partisan spirit, we must deliberately, consciously, pragmatically choose another path. If I may, I'd like to share a story of finding this commonality.

Every Tuesday of Holy Week, Campus Ministry at Notre Dame hosts an event entitled "Campus-Wide Stations of the Cross." It is, by its very nature, a traditional devotional practice of our church, and as everyone in this room knows, it has the potential to attract Catholics with a particular disposition, and leave others behind.

Over the past fifteen years, our Campus Ministry staff has worked hard to make this event a common devotion for all walks of the faithful. Contemporary meditations are written by the residence hall liturgical commissioners, and many place the concerns of each of the Stations in the modern world. (For instance, in Station One – Jesus is Condemned to Death – our students often read the names of those who have been found to have been wrongfully executed by our nation). A traditional devotion – but the emphases are rooted in contemporary concerns.

Throughout the procession, we use the traditional *Stabat Mater*. But at the Fourteenth Station, inside the darkened Basilica (Jesus is Buried in the Tomb), a host of selections follow, all creating a musical landscape around the Veneration of the Cross. From "Jesus Remember Me" to the "Coventry Litany of Reconciliation," from "Were You There" to Jim Marchionda's plaintive setting of Psalm 31 – "Father, I Put my Life in Your Hands" – the depth and plurality of old and new stand side by side.

And as a result, many right-leaning and leftist-inclined students alike have found a place at this event. Last year, more than seven hundred students and community members emptied out of their dorms and homes to walk the Way of the Cross around our campus. And the majority stayed the extra two hours beyond the procession, waiting to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation, while the Folk Choir sang softly from the loft.

I pass this along to you not as a way to advertise a Notre Dame success story. We have struggled for years to find a way to embrace many expressions of faith as we journey through Holy Week. Old and new, traditional and conservative, the careful building up of ecclesial consensus has taken place over the span of more than two decades. Campus-wide Stations, for me, represents the best of what we can do with our community when we deliberately seek out common ground in our liturgical expression. And this, too, is one of the great songs we desperately need to hand along to the next generation of church musicians. A sense of unity has been fostered – the unity of the Holy Spirit. And, once again, we move ever closer to the center of our maze.

To leave someone out of this expression – to tell a group that their music is not welcome, their gifts not worthy to be used, would be akin to a betrayal of the base approach of Jesus to his disciples after His resurrection. He did not tell them: "Meet me on my terms. Meet me where I see fit. Meet me only when you have passed all the tests or figured it out." He came to them. He broke through their walls. He walked with

them on the road to Emmaus, flexed his own creative, catechetical muscles, told the story in ways they could digest and appreciate. He met them, in all their inadequacies, and met them with compassion.

That is what we need to do. When I hear stories about choir programs being dissolved because of genre dislikes, or parishes being dissected along stylistic lines, I think of the bracelet and the slogan of the young: “What would Jesus do?” Jesus would walk with them. He would eat with them. He would absorb their stories. He would remind them of the joy they had savored in his presence. He would find a way to celebrate every gift. *Every* gift. When all the gifts of our community are explored and brought to God, then we are on the right path of the maze.

There is a gospel story we heard this past spring as we moved our way through the cycle of Easter readings. It is the story of how, after the Resurrection, the disciples once more experienced a great catch of fish: 153 fish, to be exact. Some commentaries will tell you this whimsical detail – numbering the kinds of fish brought in by the catch – was a deliberate reference to all those varieties known at the time. Not one was left outside the net. Everyone was brought in.

Two years ago, Fr. Jan Michael Joncas addressed this dedicated group, at the national convention in Milwaukee. His topic was “Style Wars.” The inference from this title’s talk is plain enough. Are we leaving people out of the net, based on our own, genre-driven, narrow definition of what is proper and good?

How do we catch everyone in the net, working out the common ground, feast to feast and week to week? Part of our job as liturgical music ministers is to help our guests feel welcome – not just by handing them a program at the door, but by putting something into that program that will be both relevant and accessible.

For instance: I am a big believer in the power of hymnody, though I may approach it in a slightly different way because of my background in guitar. With hymnody, a basic structure, fleshed out by an AABA bar form, a well-grounded tune and text, all combine to give the assembly something to hold on to, especially at the beginning of a worship experience, as we begin to find our common voice.

I cast the net at the beginning of the liturgy, and I can go in a lot of directions when the hymn is introduced. What instruments do I include? Which are kept silent? Regarding choice of tunes, I can choose one which might be inaccessible – musically mature, perhaps, but nonetheless hard to embrace by our assembly. Or I can choose a tune more well known, and sacrifice a bit of newness for strength of participation. I may choose to orchestrate that hymn solely with organ, which employs a certain number of colors in the musicians’ palette. Or, depending on the assembly, I may choose, instead, to incorporate the guitar on certain verses, coupled *with* the organ. I might hear some percussion on the piece – something that another musician might not necessarily hear, but accentuates the rhythm and gives those who like percussion something upon which to hang their hats as well.

The point is, when the opening notes are sounded, the call from my choir is clear: *Our voices are not enough. Yours are not just welcome – they are needed. We cannot be complete in our praise without you.*

My goal, with all these choices, is to find the common ground. To cast the net wide. To bring in all the fish. As much as possible, I wish to alienate no one. The song from the loft should be the leaven for the song from the pew – we find a commonality, and that is fleshed out in the choices made manifest in tune, text, and instrumentation. Young and old, left and right, traditional and contemporary – we consciously strive to become one as we sing the mystery. That song – and it goes far beyond any particular title – brings us closer to the center and mystery of the maze.

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All of us, too, have been confronted with *uncommon* ground, and we have to make decisions here as well. About fifteen years ago, I was approached by my Director of Campus Ministry and asked to research and create a new liturgical service for our community. You see, for many years our Hispanic population at Notre Dame had been growing, and we had been remiss in addressing some of their important, liturgical needs. In one of our first steps, we did what many places had been doing for ages – we celebrated the Feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.

Now for many of you this might not be a big deal. But for my ensemble, it was totally out of our element. We had to learn a repertoire not part of our normal language, and we had to partner with a choir – the Coro Primavera de Nuestra Señora – with whom we'd never worked. My students learn music by reading it; the Coro Primavera learn their music by rote. We had to respect each other's ways of learning. We had to merge our talents and resources.

And now, fifteen years down the road, the Guadalupe liturgy is one of the more eagerly anticipated liturgical events on our campus. It brings together our Hispanic dance ensemble, the Ballet Foclórico, Mariachi ND and two choirs that have grown to admire and enjoy each other's different gifts. Wondrously, this event has taken off with our students, even though its timing – December 12th – annually places it squarely in the crosshairs of final exams on our campus.

As I have looked back on this musical service on the Notre Dame campus, the Guadalupe liturgy has taught me several invaluable lessons, and they're some of the most important ones I want to share with you today.

Lesson one: if you want to develop as a musician, work outside your comfort zone! Lesson two: if you want to grow as a person of faith, learn lesson one. Work outside your comfort zone!

There is nothing more dangerous to the spiritual life than complacency. To be complacent about spiritual expression is to simply sit down in the maze and stop moving.

Recall this beautiful refrain by Bernadette Farrell:

“Restless is the heart, until it comes to rest in you.

All the earth, all the earth shall remember, and return to our God.”

These words, based on the reflections of St. Augustine, are ones I’ve struggled with my whole life. What is this restlessness all about? Is it not a curse, this attempt to know God more and more, to be itchy and unsatisfied with our musical efforts to encounter our Creator?

Over the years, I have come to see this restlessness not as a curse – but as a rich, powerful, dynamic blessing. For when our hearts are restless, they are *not* complacent. When our hearts are restless, they do not settle for armchair spirituality. For me, moving into the task of the Guadalupe liturgy was anything but comfort-filled. It made me vulnerable, exposed my own weaknesses, my own preconceptions, likes and dislikes, my biases, my own inadequacies. I was forced to learn several new languages – one on my guitar and another on my lips. And to top it all off, I had to *embrace* this discomfort if I was to be serious as a servant of the People of God through music.

I was also being stretched in ways that only now can be appreciated in the landscape of my entire spiritual life.

Stretching beyond our individual comfort zones is key to our continued growth as musicians and people of faith. Perhaps you are a trained organist who needs to come to grips with this syncopated stuff your young choir members have crammed into their iPods. Perhaps you are a guitarist who’s been trapped in the same repertoire for the past thirty years. Perhaps you’re a very competent church musician with a diverse repertoire, but somehow most of your choices lately have left you flat, and there’s that little, disquieting voice telling you to find something else....

Well, listen to that voice! It’s the voice of the Spirit, beckoning you to a wider, broader liturgical horizon, inviting you to take new risks, learn new languages, find out more about what God wants you to do with your own heart and voice. You will hear much this week – a veritable banquet of sounds and songs, a feast of musical and ecumenical expression rarely experienced. The restlessness within us will flower this week, and it is the very DNA of God’s imprinted authorship, leading us back to the Heart of our Maker.

And while we are open to this restless Spirit, another thing will come our way, something that is also part and parcel of a healthy spiritual life. When we move beyond only that which we deem legitimate or valid, into arenas that are unknown to us, we will undoubtedly see the *goodness* of this new landscape.

This stance is not rose-colored or overly naïve! We *need* to develop a more intimate knowledge of other languages, other styles of music, other cultures, other age groups, other races. Moving beyond the familiar is one of the first steps toward *admiring those that are different than us*. And admiration is the first movement of a heart of love.

More than ever before, as leaders of church music and prayer, we need to *model* that admiration. Admiration cultivates common ground. Our choirs and assemblies take their cues from us, and whether we like it or not, we pass along our biases to those with whom we work. We must teach admiration of the breadth and scope of our catholic family's musical traditions.

When I began my long adventure into the repertoire of *la Guadalupana*, even though I had an entrée because of my ability as a guitar player, I still feared what I did not know. Years later, I enter that liturgy with a completely different stance. For now I *know* of the intimate love, the flowers and the songs, the romantic melodies held in the heart of faith that flows from Tepeyac Hill. What I once feared, I now admire. I admire it because I was asked to move outside my own zone of comfort, to a zone which placed service above that of familiarity.

And could we not say the same of all the other great adventures that have led us down different musical paths over the years? For me, that path has led to the music of Ireland, exposed me to more and more hymnody – especially American folk hymnody – that would have the right fit and feel for our Notre Dame community. Perhaps, like me, you've embraced the traditions of Afro-centric music, or let the sounds of gospel harmony be lifted up, as our ensemble has done, both in a prison and under the vaulted ceilings of Notre Dame's Basilica. All of these inspired forms of music have opened our eyes wider and wider to the magnificent plurality of expression that has been unleashed by the Holy Spirit: unlocked by the creative vision of Pope John the Twenty-third, administered faithfully by Pope Paul the Sixth, and given full license to be expressed at wondrous, joyous liturgical events of the papacy of Pope John Paul the Second, those awe-inspiring, diverse, resplendent celebrations we have come to call "World Youth Day."

We have not yet begun to taste the profound fruit of the Second Vatican Council. We do not need a "reform of the reform." We need to embrace *this* reform, and meet head-on the gifts of the Holy Spirit that continue to flow from this miraculous flowering of the Holy Catholic Church. To retreat from this vision, from the creative, tangible, expressive wonder that has flowed from the Second Vatican Council, would be one of the most serious dead ends we could choose.

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In 1968, I had just begun to play the guitar, and at a certain point my church community – St. Luke's parish in Fairfax, Vermont – was subjected to my "talent." At the beginning of my first mass, one of the prominent ladies of the parish grabbed her entire family and walked out of church! She made no small matter of it, either. What we were doing, in her opinion, was stripping the liturgy of the sacredness and awe that she had known throughout her faith life. We were pouring "the Beatles into the Eucharist." Does this sound familiar to you?

But there is an epilogue to this story. Three years ago, my mother passed away and we brought her to her final resting place: back in Vermont, overlooking the Green Mountains. And there, in the side pew, was the lady who had marched out of church almost forty years ago. This time, again, I played the guitar. But they were different songs. They were classical guitar arrangements of “I Want to Walk As a Child of the Light” by Kathleen Thomerson, and the Prospect tune from American pentatonic hymnody, wedded to Marty’s text of “The Lone, Wild Bird.” They were “All Will Be Well,” the lyrics of which were written long before our time, and one of my mom’s favorites: the “Celtic Alleluia” by Fintan O’Carroll.

All these songs had been written between the time when this woman had walked out of church and my mother’s funeral liturgy forty years later. At the end of the funeral, she sought me out. And she said something that I will never forget: “you have used your gifts well, Steven.”

What I would say to her is, “We have used our gifts well.” All of us here have helped to contribute to the vital landscape that is known as the American Catholic Church. Whether we have written music or taught it, arranged it on the fly for our hand bell choirs or scaled it down from four-part to three-part settings, we have, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, relentlessly created a new repertoire over these past forty years. It is a dynamic repertoire, one that continues to evolve and inspire. And we are the stewards of that repertoire – songs that engage the young and console the aged, bringing every age off their feet, helping to mark the days of both our joy and our grief, no matter how old we are.

Two lessons come from this funeral story. The first is this: remember me? – that kid in 1968 who was itching to use his guitar and find his voice in the liturgy, even though a few people deemed it sacrilegious? That young person is on my doorstep right now, and he is on yours, too. And we may find some of their expressions odd or incongruous, or a little too contemporary, or not worth our time or the energy of a good listen. But we need to meet them, listen to them, and help them find their voice. I would not be here talking to you right now if others had not helped me in this way. Mentors and musicians along the way were good stewards, and they did not shirk from the task.

The second lesson is this: you and I have not just inherited a list of songs. We have been shown a *way to hand down our songs*: that pathway is joy, and joy is a highway into the center of our maze.

At the end of this past academic year, my chief administrator, Fr. Mark Poorman, addressed the Senior Class at our Last Visit to the Basilica and Grotto. This is an emotional night for our graduating students: it’s the first day of Commencement, of Exit and of Entrance, and the seniors gather to acknowledge the love and the threshold of bittersweet leave-taking that is soon to unfold. Let me share a bit of Mark’s text with you:

We celebrate [tonight] the gift of joy – the enduring knowledge that for the Christian, the fundamental stance toward life is joy. There's a reason why a university that joins faith and learning is a place of joy, a place of humor and cheer and constant hope. The world of ideas joined to the triumph of the Resurrection is a *formula for profound joy*. Let us never lose sight of that, regardless of our circumstances in life. Let us cultivate it in the future. Let others say about us, "How joyous those men and women are. How good their God must be."

As musicians, here is THE song we need to teach. The song of joy, more than any other, is the one that needs to be heard right now. It transcends genres, styles, ages, instruments, continents. The joy of God is a powerful antidote to a society given over not to joy, but to entertainment. The joy of God is our first and last step in the maze, before we can come to the center. Why do what we do, if not for joy in being close to God?

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Assisted by the joy of God, we come to the center of the maze. Joy brings us around the final curve, and in the heart of the maze we find: *our own hearts*, and the heart of our faith, the Cross. So now, I ask you to rejoin me in the story shared at the beginning of this talk.

Our choir had traveled to a prison, to bring joy to those who knew no freedom. Many of our students describe the annual prison concert this way: "Next to Holy Week, it's the most important thing we do." These insights, from mere teenagers! When they first begin singing, they probably hadn't experienced much by way of the corporal works of mercy. But they soon do. They begin to be catechized in what it means to touch, and to be touched by, the body of Christ. With all the lively banter – some might even say arguments – our ensemble has had over the years, regarding genre and style, prayer and performance, all is quickly silenced when you stand before the broken body of the Lord, manifested in 500 imprisoned men.

In *The Return of the Mother*, Andrew Harvey writes: "If you're really listening, if you're awake to the poignant beauty of the world, your heart breaks regularly. In fact, your heart is *made* to break! Its purpose is to burst open again and again, so that it can hold ever-more wonders."

We are now in the center of the maze, and there stands the cross of the One who was crucified, whose heart burst open so perfectly, was so amazingly full that we name it a Sacred Heart. A heart broken apart daily, shared so that all might be fed.

Every one of us in this room has had our hearts broken apart by the work we do. Most of us have experienced dark moments when we have considered giving up the lifestyle pastoral musicianship demands. We work all week long, in order to work through the weekend, our labors subjected to the sometimes micromanaging critiques

of colleagues or administrators or congregants. Everything counts, out there for all to see: No funeral can be routine. No wedding can be ordinary.

But every day, as we begin our prayers, we say the Invitatory: "Let not your hearts be hardened, if today you hear God's voice." In other words: "Lord, keep us vulnerable. Let us not become calloused. Let us not take for granted the holy ground upon which we walk. If our hearts are broken, let us not be scarred – let us still have hearts of flesh." A hardened heart, as was noted earlier, is a dangerous thing.

Sometimes we have risked (and every one of these risks is played out publicly), only to experience more than a small amount of rejection. Sometimes, musical selections we were convinced were perfect fell perfectly apart.

But risk and failed experiments are not cause for lamentation! They are reasons to rejoice: we have risked, we have ventured, have been vulnerable with our parochial families. We have been creative and sensitive in the midst of a society that attaches precious little value to either.

We have dared to be prophets, utilizing those three powerful, life-giving adjectives: full, conscious, and active! We have been advocates of FULL participation (not half-hearted!); we have tried to awaken the CONSCIOUSNESS of our assemblies (not allowing them to be complacent, semi-conscious or inert!); we have dared to call our parish families to be ACTIVE in their faith (not passive!). And in doing so, we have, inevitably, had our hearts burst open time and again. But we are not broken-hearted: we are, rather, "awake to the poignant beauty of the world." We are here to renew ourselves in our mission, in one another's company, in the unity of the Holy Spirit. Here to pass along the songs we know – not mere titles or styles, but the joy and the admiration and the wisdom and the grace.

In all we do this week, in song and prayer, in discussions and workshops, as we talk long into the night, as we wend our way through this challenging maze of song and story and society, let us stay focused on what we are about – not to be heartbroken and calloused, not to delude ourselves through the lens of entertainment, not remaining shackled to what is comfortable and secure. Let us rise and have our hearts burst open freely, understanding, even welcoming the sacrifice! Let us be open to the exhortations and the challenges of the Second Vatican Council... open to a faith so dynamic, so full of tangible joy and respect and integrity that those who listen to us cannot help but take up our song: "How joyful these musicians are! How good their God must be!"

Let us take up that diverse song of joy this week! And may God bless every note!
Thank you very much.

Steven C. Warner
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