

Sustaining the value of liturgical music into the next generation

Liturgical music in the Catholic tradition has been preserved for centuries but Australian Catholic University theologian Professor Clare Johnson says the Church should do more to draw young musicians in.

Professor Johnson, a Professor of Liturgical Studies and Sacramental Theology at ACU, and Director of the ACU Centre for Liturgy, said young people often felt alienated from the Church, but the centuries-old musical treasures could draw them back in.

“I think that music is crucial in terms of helping young people stick with church,” Professor Johnson said.

“We should work to get our young musicians hooked in, by making them welcome and letting them find their place in the Church. Music is a great way to do this.

“Young musicians should be properly trained and valued so that they can realise their place and their worth among the Church community.”

As a musician who trained at one of Australia’s oldest and prestigious music conservatoriums, Professor Johnson said liturgical music kept her invested in the Catholic faith, from as young as seven.

“The chance to sing in a liturgical choir from the age of seven was truly transformative in terms of my innate musicianship,” she said.

“I think as a teenager, the music of the liturgy kept me interested in Church, and I think that the power of music as prayer is something that we absolutely have to tap into with young people today.”

Training in Liturgical Music on offer

After graduating from the Melbourne Conservatorium of Music, Professor Johnson expanded her musical and liturgical knowledge of the Catholic Church and its musical heritage. She is now considered one of Australia’s leading teachers of liturgical music.

Professor Johnson is now calling on the next generation of liturgical musicians to receive training to take their place in parishes and faith communities. Next month she will lead a Professional Learning Seminar (and concurrent postgraduate unit) on Liturgical Music, with special guests: St Francis’ Choir director Tony Way, Queensland Conservatorium of Music pianist Jennifer Wakeling, and Bendigo Cathedral Music Director Dr Paul Taylor. The seminar is open to musicians, liturgists, clergy, teachers, pastoral associates, and parishioners.

Focusing on the official documents on music from the Second Vatican Council and onward, the face-to-face learning opportunity will explore the forms and functions of liturgy, including why certain styles like death metal and princess pop are inappropriate in Mass, the importance of Latin in liturgical music, and how to judge and select appropriate music to incorporate within the sacred liturgy.

Professor Johnson said the seminar would be an opportunity for liturgical musicians of all experience levels to learn about how their gifts can enhance the Church’s liturgies, especially parish communities.

“People will always be attracted to a parish that has good music because music is an artistic means of communicating with God, and done well, it expresses what words alone cannot. But if a parish has inappropriate music, or doesn't resource its liturgical music properly, then it isn't surprising to see fewer people attending regularly,” Professor Johnson said.

Music helps assemblies to pray

Liturgical musicians as an integral part of a congregation, can encourage worshipping assemblies to pray the Church’s liturgy deeply and powerfully.

“The affinity that we have for music as human beings is one of the best ways that we can actually bond a group together who don't normally gather together,” Professor Johnson said.

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“When you have a gathering of people at a wedding or a funeral, and they're not necessarily familiar with each other in the way that a regular worshipping assembly is, music can be one of the key ways to bond them.

“If you can get them engaging together musically, they become one in body, voice, and intent which can be incredibly powerful spiritually. Enticing them to join in takes good leadership and musical training.”

Registrations for the Liturgical Music Professional Learning Seminar are now open. Visit the ACU Centre for Liturgy website [here](#) for details on how to register.

Professor Clare Johnson is available for interviews.

Media Contact: Emilie Ng, 0475 963 606, emilie.ng@acu.edu.au