

In 1868, an American Baptist minister, Robert Wadsworth Lowry, wrote a familiar hymn that I have no doubt you will recognize:

My life flows on in endless streams, above earth's lamentation; I hear the sweet though far off hymn that hails a new creation. No storm can shake my inmost calm, while to that rock I'm clinging; since love is lord of heaven and earth, how can I keep from singing."

To be completely honest, I haven't felt much like singing over the past two months. The storm that has and continues to shake our inmost calm in our present crisis, with reports and allegations once again of abuse and hierarchical cover up and corruption, has felt like a pall descend and remain over us all, especially those of us in leadership and ministry in the Church. We live in a challenging time, but we are not without hope and confidence. The Church though entrusted by our Lord to sinful persons is nevertheless God's community of faith, a living sign in the world of God's redeeming love and mercy and one which he will never abandon, no matter what. So, indeed how can we keep from singing!

My dear friends, pastoral musicians of the Diocese of Wichita, I thank you for your faithful ministry in service to the liturgical life of our Church. I know your ministry is not easy, for often the resources, both material and human are not as abundant as we would always hope. You also offer a most public service, which like my own, is vulnerable and subject to criticism, sometimes severe, uncharitable and without basis. You also are subject to a certain burn out when it comes to longevity. I recall in my youth, a lady, Mary Krueger, who climbed the steps to the choir loft of our little church Sunday after Sunday, year after year for over thirty years, to play the organ and to lead the small but dedicated choir. One day, she simply said, enough. I want to come to mass without any responsibilities and to attend mass with my husband and family. After that, we went for several years without anyone taking her place. All of these and so many other things are unique and real challenges to the ministry of pastoral musician.

But let it be said that your ministry is vital to the Liturgical life of the church, for liturgy without music is not liturgy, so integral is music in all its dimensions to the public prayer of the community of faith. As your bishop, I long for a renewal of liturgical music in our diocese, where excellence and quality are the foundations of what we do in the liturgical experience. I want to work for a time once again where every parish has a trained organist so that these beautiful instruments, once the pride of place in the liturgy will sing once again and lead, as they do so well, the liturgical prayer of our people. I long for congregations that truly sing and participate as the documents of the liturgy expect, for we all know or at least we should that the sung liturgy has itself the power to change hearts, to convert souls and to inspire great virtue. I fear we are not tapping into that power in our day and time, thus robbing the liturgy of forming disciples and helping God's people to become fully alive in Christ Jesus.

All of you and the many others involved in this ministry can help to make these longings and hopes a reality by seeking such quality and excellence and calling others to do so as well. To that end, I would welcome from each of you an ongoing conversation as to how we can accomplish these important goals together. Because essentially, your task as is mine and everyone in public ministry is to keep the church singing, to help us remember that NO STORM CAN SHAKE OUR INMOST CALM, WHILE TO THAT ROCK WE'RE CLINGING; SINCE LOVE IS LORD OF HEAVEN AND EARTH, HOW CAN WE KEEP FROM SINGING!