

Learning to Combine Gifts and Expertise

by Clarisa Ramos

For as long as I can remember, liturgical music has always been a part of me and has been the source of some of my most moving experiences within the liturgy. I have vivid memories of myself as a small girl standing in awe during the “Gloria” and just being covered in goose bumps because of the in absolute majesty and beauty that it expresses.

Around the age of seven I began my first formal experience in liturgical music when I joined the children’s choir at my parish, Holy Spirit Catholic Church in Duncanville, TX. Because of various directors’ encouragement and my own enjoyment of the experience, I continued singing whenever possible. My role as cantor began at the age of twelve when I sang for a large diocesan liturgy at the cathedral in downtown Dallas. While I still struggled to overcome my nerves of singing solo, I understood that taking on this leadership role was a great responsibility and I was honored and ready to do so.

During middle school a few other students and I were responsible for selecting and providing all of the music for our daily masses. Throughout middle school and high school I continued to cantor regularly at my own parish and schools as well as for various events at several other parishes around the Diocese’ of Dallas and Forth Worth such as World Youth Day at Six Flags over Texas in 2003.

While I am so thankful for the musical talents with which God has blessed me, I believe that it is also part of my calling and my responsibility that I nurture these gifts by pursuing further musical education. My acceptance of this calling was not fully realized until coming to the University of Notre Dame where I am currently a rising junior Vocal Performance Major. I

auditioned for the Notre Dame Folk Choir my first weekend on campus and was warmly welcomed into the family.

Through my experiences in the Folk Choir under the direction of Steven Warner, I have learned more deeply how I am called to humbly pour out my gifts for God's glory. Every time we gather Steve makes every aspect of our work a prayer, beginning with rehearsal and extending throughout every liturgy. Being a part of this faith filled musical community has helped me recognize more and more what it means to be a music *ministry* and how we are all pastoral ministers- to the congregation and to each other. In singing a mixture of both more classical as well as ethnic genres of music, we are able to fully serve the people of God by reflecting the song of the assembly. In every aspect of my involvement with Folk Choir- whether it's singing together with the choir, cantoring, or recording for the NDprayercast, I truly feel at peace and know that I am so blessed to be able to serve the Church in those ways.

Among Steve's many powerful compositions, one particularly inspirational for me- "I Have Been Anointed" best captures my journey as a pastoral musician. The chorus begins, "I have been anointed with a song of the Lord; A song of love and compassion, a song to set me free..." The song I feel is inside of me, these talents I possess, my yearning to improve and learn more- it's not for me, but for God. It's *God's* song inside of me. It's a wonderful gift God has blessed me with and I am called to sing it for the Lord- to glorify God's name so that I may be set "free." I now realize that serving God and His church through music is something I want to do for life.

Because I truly enjoy singing and it is something I desire to do properly and be well educated about, I am confident that my experiences as a vocal performance major will serve me tremendously in my role as a pastoral musician. Upon earning my undergraduate degree, I hope

to then take part in the Master of Sacred Music program at Notre Dame. My dream is that in combining my gifts with expertise I am able to work for the good of God's Church as effectively as possible.

I am so very grateful for the experiences God has blessed me with as a pastoral musician thus far and can confidently say that I am excited about the experiences which lie ahead.