

## **THEN SINGS MY SOUL** **PERSPECTIVES ON PARISH LITURGICAL MUSIC**

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In *Teaching a Stone to Talk*, Annie Dillard describes her experience of a church music group at a particular Catholic liturgy:

The lead is a tall, square-jawed teenaged boy, buoyant and glad to be here. . . There is an old woman, wonderfully determined; she has long orange hair and is dressed country-and-western style. . . There is also a very tall teen-aged girl; she is delicate of feature, half-serene and half-petrified, a wispy soprano.

It all seems a pity at first, for I have overcome a fiercely anti-Catholic upbringing in order to attend Mass simply and solely to escape Protestant guitars. Why am I here? Who gave these nice Catholics guitars? Why are they not mumbling in Latin and performing superstitious rituals? What is the Pope thinking of?<sup>1</sup>

Although written in a north-American context, as Irish Catholics we can recognize similar composite groups in our nationwide parish music landscape, as well as the style of liturgical music inferred in this account. While Dillard's acerbic, "who gave these nice Catholics guitars?" has become an attractive tag-line in debates regarding style and genre in liturgical music in the post-Vatican II period, this is not the purpose of this article. What follows is a tapestry of thoughts and reflections on liturgical music in Irish parishes today, underscored by two long-held personal beliefs: firstly, that any discussion on the reality of liturgical music in Ireland today necessarily holds congregational participation as its centre – but not as its totality. Secondly, that the success and worth of our efforts as liturgical musicians is shaped and directly affected by a question of increasing pastoral concern: that of collaborative ministry - within the Catholic church in Ireland in general and within the celebration of the liturgy in particular. With this in mind, I intend to develop these reflections (largely from a pastoral perspective) with primary reference to the personnel involved in the liturgical music enterprise, concentrating on the Sunday Roman Rite Eucharist as the locus of parochial liturgical music-making.

### **A NEW SONG**

Composers are the unseen collaborators in our musical endeavours. The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy*, promulgated forty-five years ago this year, mandated the composition of new songs which would serve the 'new liturgy,' and subsequent conciliar and post-conciliar documents built on the principles of this mandate. Article 21 of the *Constitution* most clearly identified the challenge:

Let them (*composers*) produce compositions having the qualities proper to genuine sacred music, not confining themselves to works that can be sung only by large choirs, but providing also for the needs of small choirs and for the active participation of the entire assembly of the faithful. The texts intended to be sung must always be consistent with Catholic teaching: indeed, they should be drawn chiefly from holy Scripture and from liturgical sources.

The permissible use of the vernacular spawned a flurry of new compositions internationally in what might be viewed as the first wave of liturgical music compositions. A rummage around the organ gallery in nine out of ten Irish parish churches today will reveal that compositions from this period are the bulk and core repertoire being heard and sung in Irish parish churches in 2008, four decades on. This is not necessarily a testament to the quality of these compositions but, rather, the promotion and availability of certain compositions and composers. In the initial scramble to produce music in the vernacular, early compositions often took hold. Staples in the English-speaking world such as *Be Not Afraid, Here I am, Lord* and *Song for a Young Prophet* took root and have become what we might term favourites or ‘classics’ in the Irish repertoire, the attractiveness of their musical and textual setting securing their place.

The publishing houses of the United States have enjoyed considerable success in the Irish market. This may be attributed to both the volume and diversity of musical compositions produced as well as the marketing power of the two main players in the American music publishing scene, Oregon Catholic Press (OCP) and Gregorian Institute of America (GIA). This is evidenced by scanning the music sections of religious shops nationwide. Through their widespread appeal and availability, the soundworld of composers such as Marty Haugen, David Haas and Michael Joncas permeates our parish liturgies, along with English composers such as Bernadette Farrell and Christopher Walker, whose music is published and distributed by these corporations. And these are composers of immense musical competence and liturgical expertise. Conscious of the mandate set by *Sacrosanctam Concilium*, these works often display an exemplary commitment to its vision as outlined above, with compositions scored for a variety of musical resources and abilities: the majority are accessible to cantor or unison choir with either keyboard (organ) or guitar accompaniment, supplemented by optional parts for four-part choir, string, brass, woodwind and percussion instruments. They cater for any (or most) liturgical, musical and pastoral situations. But is their soundworld ours?

In twenty-first century Ireland, we could easily, and almost unconsciously, hold the term ‘vernacular’ as being synonymous with ‘English-speaking’. Crucial to this discussion is the reclamation of vernacular as *vernaculus*, meaning being born in or of the house - being native to a particular place. Our identity and practice as modern Irish Catholics is indelibly marked and shaped by the history, language and culture of our country. While looking to, and learning from, successful liturgical music practices in other countries and cultures, we need to develop and have access to indigenous liturgical music. A vernacular liturgy rooted in an Irish sense of liturgy and identity, with music composed by Irish composers and/or using Irish idioms; a musical language and soundworld which allows us to connect with the generations of faithful who have gone before us – without access to these riches, our liturgical music lacks a rootedness, a grounding which transcends questions of musical style and language. It is a question of identity. Yet both faith and culture in Ireland have undergone radical changes in the decades since the Council, making a definition of Irish cultural identity richly complex.

## **NATIVE RESOURCES**

We are fortunate to have composers of immense musical skill and sensitivity to the practice of liturgy in Ireland who toil to produce compositions which can speak in, through and beyond these changes. We have the music of what we might term ‘established composers’ from the first wave of Irish compositions for the reformed liturgy, such as Seoirse Bodley, Sean O’Riada, Margaret Daly, Fintan O’Carroll and Thomas Egan. While they differ in musical idiom, language and form, they share a noble simplicity and beauty which has endured them to liturgical musicians. Their works are well

established due also, in no small part, to the availability of their compositions over a particular period of time in post-conciliar publications such as *The Veritas Hymnal* and *Alleluia! Amen!* While the church in the United States can identify itself as being in the third phase of vernacular liturgical music composition, here in Ireland we may admit that our primary sources are these ‘first wave’ compositions. The music of composers such as John McCann, Ronan McDonagh and Sue Furlong is less well known. Drawing on a variety of musical expressions and idioms, their willingness to contribute to the liturgical music repertoire of Ireland today is enormously encouraging in the face of imported music which floods our liturgical music suppliers.

The promotion and publication of new liturgical music in Ireland tends to be driven by trends in the market and the ‘appeal’ of certain musical styles, rather than ministerial needs. This immediately presents a real problem for our native composers: how do they reach fellow liturgical musicians? Some initiatives in recent years are noteworthy. *Seinn Alleluia*, a modest hymnal published by Dublin Diocese in the Jubilee Year, featured music by these and other composers; likewise, the national hymnal published by Veritas, *In Caelo*, which was edited by Liam Lawton. In the years 1997 and 2001 RTE ran two Church Music Competitions, inviting composers in Ireland to submit pieces for liturgical use in a variety of styles, forms and languages. In the resultant compilation *I Sing for Joy* Adrian Moynes, Managing Director of RTE Radio, succinctly states the value of this initiative:

The purpose of these competitions was two-fold: firstly, to encourage Irish composers of liturgical music, who would otherwise have few opportunities to publicize their work and, secondly, to provide new, Irish-composed music which would be suitable for use by ordinary parish choirs. Our experience of broadcasting two Sunday liturgies every week since the inception of RTE Radio 80 years ago, had shown us that there was a heavy reliance on international sources for music in weekly liturgies. Yet we also believed that there were many Irish composers with an interest in this genre of music.<sup>2</sup>

The Irish Church Music Association (ICMA) has been singularly committed to the inclusion and promotion of existing and new music by Irish composers in the books of its annual Summer School, which draws hundreds of church musicians each year. It has had a history of publication which, though limited, has made several seminal contributions to the field, the most recent being the revised *Responsorial Psalms for Sundays and Major Feast Days* by Fintan O’Carroll and the collection following the ICMA’s Year of the Eucharist Hymn Competition in 2005, *Remain With Us, Lord*. All these collections, however, fight for attention and recognition in a market already saturated.

A bigger question may be the local factors pertaining to these composers’ dissemination of their own music. We could posit two situations in which the vast majority of composers write. The first in when a particular text marries itself to a musical setting in the imagination of the composer; i.e., when ‘inspiration’ hits. The second, and perhaps the more frequent, occurs in response to a particular liturgical-pastoral need which presents itself, especially when the composer is also active in the field of church music direction on a weekly basis. Thus the composer, writing for a particular musical group, for a particular community, for a particular need or occasion, may not deem his/her work as being relevant or of use to others in a wider context, and so will not pursue avenues in which to disseminate his/her work. In addition, we have very few liturgical music composers in Ireland whose work is, in part or in full, sponsored by their local parish or diocese, so that composers are carrying out their craft under the constraints of other work and employment, in addition to personal and family commitments. While there are exceptions, we can see little serious commitment to, or investment in, liturgical music in Ireland today by the local and national Church. It is our loss as

practicing musicians, clergy and congregations that we do not have structures to allow us more ready access to these riches.

These remarks are, in no way, intended to suggest that we dismiss the wealth of liturgical music available to us from other countries. The music of Lourdes, as well as compositions of the British and American Catholic Churches, have become staples of the Irish diet. It is also realistic to say that, as a nation, we are as capable of producing poor quality musical compositions as any other. If we are to nurture the development of Irish liturgical music, however, we need to carve out a space where it can grow and be tested.

### **THE MUSIC MAKERS**

At a deanery gathering of parish liturgical musicians a couple of years ago, a portion of the day was given to facilitating participants in an informal discussion about their experience of being involved in music in their parishes. Once the question of initial involvement was answered, people were asked why they continued to be involved, week after week, in liturgical music in their parishes – what attracted and held them. The group of thirty-five consisted of a diversity of ages and roles: choir directors, organists, folk group leaders, cantors and ‘ordinary’ choir members. To a man/woman, the same answer came back: it brought them closer to God - it nourished their faith and their prayer lives.<sup>3</sup>

I was taken aback at the unanimity of this response, having expected music to be the primary attractant. Doubtless if these people did not have gifts in music-making, their desire to serve would take the form of another ministry or role with their faith community. Yet the language of ministry, used in its general application to refer to liturgical music provision, may not translate readily into personal identity. While parishioners readily accept the titles of Ministers of the Word and (Extra-Ordinary) Ministers of the Eucharist, we rarely speak of a Minister of Music. When I suggested to two of the respondents mentioned above that their ministry was a great gift to their parish, they balked at the idea – “we just sing in the choir.” In a sense, their stance embodies a theology of ministry rooted squarely in the universal call to holiness and mission shared by all the laity by virtue of our baptism. Individual responses to this call among the people of God to carry out the Church’s mission and vocation may differ functionally, but they are all part of our common vocation. Each is called to give of their gifts for the good of the community and, if St. Paul is to be believed, the Lord will provide the gifts and skills that are needed in each community. If this is so, why do we hear the frequent cry that it is impossible to get musicians/singers/choir members in our parishes around the country? Is the Lord not calling or providing these people?

### **THE REALITIES OF MINISTRY**

At local level, the call to liturgical music ministry can be difficult to discern and respond to. Ministers of the Word or Eucharist generally find themselves on a rota: they commit to serving at a particular mass and at a particular rate or frequency. On a weekly basis, their preparation is minimal and unenforced; to some extent, they ‘turn up’, carry out their ministry, and go home. While their ministry is corporate, the functioning of it can be highly individual and personal (at a purely human, occupational level). This is not intended in any way to disparage the sacred service of these ministers, but, rather, to place it alongside the commitment prospects of potential choir/music group members. Ordinarily, they must be prepared to give up one to two hours every week for a rehearsal, and commit to being present at the same Mass, at the same time, every week. As well as the significant investment of time, the deeper challenge is the personal and emotional investment inherent. Neophyte choir

members find themselves relinquishing control of their minds and bodies to an existing, initiated group. They are told when and where to sit, who they may sit beside, even when they may or may not breathe! They are given specific sounds in their mouths and words in their mind, which they must unify with those around them. Regardless of tiredness, state of mind or 'mood', choir or music group members may not turn up to a practice or mass and just 'sit there': they are forced to harness their minds and bodies into the aerobic exercise that is singing. Instrumentalists, similarly, find a certain surrendering of themselves in becoming part of the organism that is the music group.

This involvement is an intensely social, interpersonal experience in the way that membership of the other ministry groups is not, and one which can be hugely challenging as well as enriching and exhilarating. It can take up to a year of full involvement before a group member will feel comfortable with the repertoire, the rituals and practices of the group in the exercising of its ministry, and with his/her own identity within this group, as well as in the wider worshipping community. Conversely, the social aspect of the group can provide a welcoming place for a new member of a community that is singular among the liturgical ministries. In our choir in Ashbourne, the past five years have seen us welcome people of different cultures and nationalities, as well as those moving into new housing developments in the parish. Some join the choir for the duration of their time in the parish, knowing it is limited and uncertain due to economic factors and employment. Interestingly, this profile is not replicated in the other ministry groups.

David Power employs the term *established ministries* to refer to the official ministries of lector and acolyte and *unestablished* to refer to all the other lay ministries which have evolved in the Church, especially since the Second Vatican Council.<sup>4</sup> In tracing the history of ministry in the first five centuries of the Church's life, he cites "official appointment, personal choice and the grace of the Spirit," as the grounds on which persons serve the Church in ministerial roles.<sup>5</sup> Most parishes today provide some kind of training or induction for Ministers of the Eucharist (and, although often less so, for Ministers of the Word) and frequently announce the ministry of these individuals with a commissioning service. We have no equivalent ritualizing process for music ministers. On this question of the recognition of ministries, Power repudiates the need for the present canonical rites for the commissioning of acolytes and readers, asserting: "many of the actions which they require can be done by one and all, and simply need care and supervision to be done well." On the other hand, he recognizes that some ministries require special skills and training: music direction, teaching, prayer in public, being among these. He suggests that a blessing could be a way of recognizing these ministries, used as a means of bringing a process of discernment to a close.<sup>6</sup>

Commissioning and ritualizing of ministers can be an area of sensitive, pastoral concern for each community, but we cannot deny that organists, directors and cantors are highly skilled and highly specialized offices. The training and corresponding competency of the people we charge with these responsibilities in liturgical music is a question which Irish parishes, on the whole, have yet to address. Professionalism in ministry is increasingly being seen not only as a value but a necessity, in a society where professional competency and educational qualifications are highly prized in the secular world. We do a grave disservice to both our worshipping communities and to the musicians emerging from that community if we do not support their ministry with education and formation. This training needs to address both the liturgical and musical aspects of the ministry. While the vast majority of people involved in music in Irish parishes have surfaced due to their interest and skills in music, few have had the benefit of theological or liturgical formation. Without such training, the service aspect of music in the liturgy can become the primary loss. Music as background 'filler' and music as 'performance', as two extremes, typify this lack of awareness. The marriage of music to the liturgical action, the relationship of the responsorial psalm and gospel acclamation to the Scripture readings, the primacy of

certain sung parts of the Mass over others, the distinct and complementary musical roles of the various liturgical agents – these principles can only be taught, not caught (to invert the adage pertaining to faith). Poor liturgical awareness in parish music-making is a punishing cycle which ensures its own survival. An organist, director or cantor has often only experienced music in their own parish and has little or no recourse to other practices, due to their own weekly commitment.

### **PROFESSIONALISM IN MINISTRY**

At national level, there are a number of opportunities in place for the training and formation of music ministers in the Catholic liturgy. The National University of Ireland, Maynooth runs a Diploma in Arts specializing in Church Music, while the Pontifical University at Maynooth offers a specialization in liturgical music as a Master's in Theology degree. These weight formation in liturgical awareness and practice along with development in musicianship and execution skills. A Master's Degree in Chant and Ritual Song at the University of Limerick, run in conjunction with Glenstal Abbey, takes a more explorative stance. The Irish Church Music Association holds its annual summer school in July, in addition to offering an outreach service of workshops and seminars throughout the year. Likewise, the National Centre for Liturgy conducts liturgical music workshops at various locations and includes such formation as part of its qualifications. Diocesan initiatives at deanery and parish levels vary, and may risk focusing solely on provision of resources – while this is necessary, materials without the skills to use them are less than effective.

The *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* calls for a commitment to train, “at least one or two properly trained singers,” for every church or worshipping community. This commitment would involve not just initial training but the provision of professional employment for musicians at the parish level. The *Guidelines for the Payment of Church Musicians*, issued and updated annually, provides a rationale for the financing and formalizing of liturgical music provision at the parish level. The document clearly emphasises the value placed on qualifications and on-going training, recognizing the benefit for both the musician and the parish of on-going formation. As an institution, the Irish Catholic Church has been slow to recognize the need for professionalism in ministry in general and, at present, shows little or no concern for the provision of on-going formation and training for ministers in the field. Currently, liturgical musicians who undertake study and training do so, largely, of their own volition and initiative. Pastoral and liturgical leaders at local level would do well to prize these individuals and create opportunities for them to share the benefits of their training with other liturgical musicians, in whatever ways this may be accomplished.

### **LITURGICAL LEADERSHIP**

A number of terms have been used interchangeably and, somewhat indiscriminately, in this article to date: church musicians, liturgical musicians, parish musicians, music ministers. Within these we have assumed the identification of those who carry an overall responsibility for music: this might be the organist, choir director or cantor. The designation of ‘leader’ is not entirely appropriate here as, ultimately, the leader of liturgical music in the celebration of Mass is the presiding priest.

This idea, I know, will make some priests break out into a cold sweat. The working relationships between priests and their parish musicians can be very complex. A priest recently remarked to me, “it’s very difficult to find musicians and even more difficult to get rid of them.” The need for professional procedures and standards is underscored by this wry remark - a professionalism that is needed on both sides. In the Irish Church it would seem that, where parochial church music is

concerned, servitude is often more highly prized than competency. A priest may inherit a difficult situation where mediocrity in musical and liturgical standards is rife and territorialism abounds. I know many priests who are unhappy with the music in their parishes but are paralyzed by the fear that any intervention of theirs will result in alienating parishioners and those who have served in the parish for years. There is also a condition which I refer to as ‘plausible deniability,’ whereby a priest feels his own lack of musical competency renders him unqualified to talk about liturgical music in his parish.

The priest cannot avoid being intimately involved with music in the liturgy as the liturgy is, by its very nature, musical. The rhythm and cadences of the presidential prayers demand a lyrical, nuanced delivery in order to render them meaningful, in order for them to make sense to the listeners. The call and response form of the dialogues demands that the celebrant place the words on his voice in a prepared, conscious manner. The poetic, musical form of the liturgical script finds its high point in the Eucharistic prayer where, without committing a single note to musical expression, the celebrant recites the text in a chant-like manner.

The appointment of a ‘singing priest’ to a parish is, doubtless, a great gift to the community and to the musicians who serve the liturgy alongside him. It is not the duty of the priest to achieve heights of musical excellence but to work with, rather than against, the music of the liturgy he leads. The simple vernacular chant settings of the greetings, dialogues and Eucharistic prayer in the Missal cater for the minimum of musical capabilities; some are the tiniest of small steps from the declamatory style of speech the celebrant will naturally employ (I am thinking here of introductory and concluding ‘The Lord be with you’ greeting in particular). The celebrant who uses even these two notes (regardless of the melodiousness or even the accuracy of them) admits music into the liturgy in a way that is irreplaceable. Placing notes on his voice in any shape signals clearly to all liturgical agents and participants that music is part of the liturgy, that it is natural and proper to the celebration of the liturgical rites. Without this welcome, music is always a guest at the celebration, politely asking to gain entry (or, in some cases, forcing its way in).

One of the most obvious signals that music is an outsider in the liturgy, and the preserve of the few, is the demeanour of the presiding priest during the sung parts of the Mass. The priest who uses the singing of the Responsorial Psalm as an opportunity to flick through his homily notes sends a clear message to the assembly (as does the musician who spends the duration of the homily preparing his/her music). The celebrant who assumes a posture of piety, with lips and hands folded tightly during the sung acclamations of the Eucharistic prayer, similarly speaks of the superfluous nature of singing in the Mass. With all the basic supports in place for congregational singing, a congregation will not sing if their leader in worship does not (or if they do not, at least, see his lips moving). In this way, the ministry of a cantor or music director in attempting to lead the congregation in the parts of the Mass which are rightly theirs to sing is placed in direct contrast or even competition with that of the presiding priest, when all are striving to serve God’s people in the same liturgy.

The need for collaboration between priests and music ministers is inescapable. The endurance of the ‘four-hymn liturgy’, while perpetuated by the structuring of *The Veritas Hymnal*, reveals a reluctance on the part of musicians to ‘interfere’ with the Mass. It also may reveal a preference of presiders to keep music in its place, along with musicians. Many pastoral and practical reasons are cited for decisions and attitudes regarding music in parishes, time and pressurized schedules being one very real phenomenon of an Irish Church that is still, in the main, over-massed. The most neglected sung elements, the acclamations, add a matter of seconds to the celebration of a liturgy when sung. The start of the liturgical seasons can provide priests with a valid and acceptable reason for encouraging musicians to lead the congregation in these parts. The provision of a ‘quiet mass’ in most parishes always strikes me as somewhat of an oxymoron – surely silence in the face of the Eucharistic

mystery is integral to every liturgy, regardless of music provision? Every Mass, in this way, is a ‘quiet Mass,’ just as every Mass is celebrated most fully when its musical elements are realized.

The following three-fold function of music was outlined in the 1980 *Universa Laus* Document, *De la musique dans les liturgies chretiennes*:

1. to support and reinforce the proclamation of the Gospel in all its forms
2. to give fuller expression to professing one’s faith
3. to enhance the sacramental rite in its dual aspect of action and word.<sup>7</sup>

It strikes me that these are objectives equally applicable to the ministry of presiding priests as much as the ministry of liturgical musicians. There is a question here of liturgical ownership as well as liturgical and pastoral leadership. The emergence of articulate, competent, professional lay ministers in a worshipping community can leave the priest painfully aware of any weaknesses in his own practice. There is a need for on-going liturgical formation and resourcing of clergy, and a case to be made for facilitating discussion and formation in the area of liturgical music with music ministers and priests together.

### **THEN SINGS MY SOUL**

At a funeral Mass last month, a family member asked me to sing the hymn *How Great Thou Art*. As it is a piece that I rarely choose to sing myself or teach, it afforded me the opportunity to consider the text as I never had the opportunity of doing before. The initial phrase of the refrain, containing the words, ‘then sings my soul,’ struck me as particularly insightful in considering the topic of congregational participation. It is an issue which deserves much more concentrated discussion than it will be afforded here; there are just two aspects I would like to consider.

The first is by asking what we mean or, indeed, expect when we speak of, “full, active, conscious participation,” in relation to liturgical music in Ireland today. It is true that there is little more exhilarating or uplifting than to hear a congregation lift the roof in song. Yet we do not have a history of this kind of vocal group activity in either our worship history or our cultural heritage. The *sean nos* tradition involves a solo singer relating a story of the deepest moments of life’s sorrows and joys, while those gathered listen intently to the song and voice their assent to its pathos and truth through this active listening. If we equate interior assent with outward vocalizing, we ignore this powerful channel of communication and participation in the liturgy which lies at the heart of an oral tradition. Also, to equate the production of large quantities of volume with a more conscious or profound interior assent than with a smaller, *sotte voce* sound or silence is naïve and simplistic. How can we measure the song of the soul? The adjective “full” may also infer that all of the music in the liturgy be congregational. This approach distorts the very nature and shape of the liturgy and the role of music within it. It is certain that a music director who chooses music which prevents the congregation from participating in the parts of the Mass that are rightly theirs abuses his/her role. Yet the power of the sung word to teach and minister to people (as St. Paul advocates) can be received and digested as food for the soul in the way that the Scripture readings are received without the whole congregation reciting them aloud with the lector. Proclamation is a form for the sung word as well as the spoken word. Whether we use the word ‘participation’ or speak of involvement, inclusion or encouragement, surely the aim of liturgical musicians is to enable the souls of those gathered to sing, a profound and, ultimately, unquantifiable movement?

The second point situates congregational singing within the wider celebration of the local Eucharistic community. The very act of singing, itself, can serve as unifying force among participants. However, unity of expression – to my mind – is largely an expression of unity in a liturgical

community. This unity both exists between the members who gather for worship and also, visibly, in the liturgical ministers who carry special responsibility within the liturgy. It always amazes me that people who are neighbours, friends or colleagues of their fellow Mass-goers can stand outside the door of their parish church in avid conversation and friendship and then enter the Church, move apart and sit at the opposite end of the pew to these friends and neighbours. In many parishes we still have a poorly developed sense of table fellowship when it comes to the Sunday Eucharist. This lack of comfort or unity within the assembly is notable in the responses and prayers of the Mass which, in 90% of Irish parishes, are mumbled and incoherent. The lack of a communal vocal identity in the prayers, responses and dialogues of the Mass means there is a massive leap to be made to unified, unison singing. A hearty, heart-felt sound is more likely to be produced in a community where participants feel a strong communion with each other, with the place they are worshipping in and with the presider who leads them in prayer. The spiritual, pastoral and catechetical life of the parish community exerts considerable influence here, as well as the deepest experiences of the people gathered. Neither will musicians or priests find that there is a 'formula' which can be used to guarantee congregational participation. There are basic tools and rules of thumb: the provision of words as a basic resource, developing a corpus of music over time which participants can become familiar with, drawing on music which has a traditional basis in the community and which is known, using a cantor to lead, keeping the range and pace of a piece within the congregation's reach. Yet there are no hard and fast rules: one of the two 'Our Father' settings to have established itself in the country is the 'Ar nAthair' by Sean O Riada, a piece which employs a wide melodic range and a free rhythmic pattern.<sup>8</sup>

The danger of harbouring an exclusive concentration on congregational singing is a disenchantment and frustration if we do not bring forth the results we expect. This is not to suggest that we should give up but, rather, that there needs to be a more nuanced understanding of the role and function of music in Irish liturgies today, an understanding which respects both the intelligence and freedom of the individuals gathered for worship and which facilitates the building up of Christ's body in the communal Eucharistic celebration.

## CONCLUSION

This article has answered very few questions and has not treated any of the topics touched upon with any significant weight or insight. The excerpt quoted at the start by Annie Dillard resonates with me at a personal level, having had a fiercely anti-Catholic upbringing (anti-Church, rather than of any other religious persuasion) and coming to liturgical music, in the first instance, through membership of a similar group. Dillard's key question, "Why am I here?" is one which all liturgical agents – composers, liturgical musicians, priests and congregants – need to keep perpetually in mind, alongside the awareness that, whatever reasons compel us to do what we do in the liturgy, we are indelibly connected and in relationship with each other in our ministerial roles. Let this be the starting point for a shared debate and a shared learning.

## NOTES:

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<sup>1</sup> Annie Dillard, *Teaching a Stone to Talk: Expeditions and Encounters* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982), 17.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Kenny, ed., *I Sing For Joy: Music From the RTE Radio One Church Music Competitions* (Dublin: The Columba Press, 2006).

<sup>3</sup> The gathering was originally conceived as a cantor's workshop in my own parish and, due to local interest, developed into a day's seminar and workshop entitled *Our Lenten Song: Liturgical Music in the Season of Lent*.

<sup>4</sup> David Power, *Gifts That Differ: Lay Ministries Established and Unestablished* (New York: Pueblo Publishing Company, 1980), vii-viii.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid*, 59-84.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 157-158 and 133-147.

<sup>7</sup> Claude Duchesneau and Michel Veuthy, eds., *Music and Liturgy: The Universa Laus Document and Commentary*, trans. Paul Inwood (Washington: The Pastoral Press, 1992), 15.

<sup>8</sup> The other setting beloved of Irish congregations is the setting by Estelle White.

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