

KOINONIA:

A Publication of the Diocese of New York and New Jersey

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Singing as Evangelism	1
Proclaiming the Gospel in Song	2
From the Fathers: St. John of Karpathos	2
Music in the Church by Archpriest Ion Bria	3
St. Olympia Mission is Ready	4

SING PRAISES TO OUR GOD! SING PRAISES!

by Archpriest Eric G. Tosi

Oh, sing to the Lord a new song! Sing to the Lord, all the earth. Sing to the Lord, bless His name; Proclaim the good news of His salvation from day to day.

(Psalm 96:1-2)

I was leaving the Divine Liturgy in Arusha, Tanzania a few years back. It was a beautiful service with Orthodox clergy from around the world. As we left the church building, we were greeted by a group of Orthodox children who were singing traditional Orthodox hymns, set to African melodies. The hymns were sung with great exuberance – and the children were literally dancing to them, showing their love for the Faith. I asked one of the priests if this was a normal part of their services, and he told me how the African culture, particularly the African Christian culture, was deeply infused with this tradition. It was how they all witnessed their faith to the world! They sang to show their faith to others.

What a beautiful way of thinking about evang-



elism: to sing to reach others! We often forget this in the Church. Singing is so deeply embedded in the Orthodox Faith, and yet we lose sight that music is there to evangelize ourselves and our neighbors. Our hymns are full of deep theology about what we believe, and so they are unlike other music, be it religious or secular. Why not use it to evangelize?

I am not suggesting we stand in the front of the church and sing and dance (that is particular to a culture). Still, we have many ways in which we can use singing to evangelize. Our

hymns are our Faith, so use them to teach and preach. Holy Week alone is a “master’s class” in Orthodox theology. At the last All-American Council, I witnessed an event of such sublime beauty, such heartening joy, that it brought me close to tears. I know that the others who witnessed this also were moved to tears. The youth who were in attendance at the Council were out on a day trip and were returning to the hotel. I was watching them from a balcony as they walked into the main lobby; and they were singing, from memory, the hymns of the Church, including the *Beatitudes*, the *Paschal Canon*, *O Gladsome Light*, and others. They were doing it with such simple beauty and fervor, witnessing in their unique way the impact of the Church on their own lives. And they were loving it, singing as loudly as they could and encouraging one another to sing. All I could think of was the verse from Matthew 21:16, “*Out of the mouth of babes and nursing infants You have perfected praise!*”

Proclaiming the Gospel in Song

“It is better to sing simple music well – and in a prayerful manner – than to sing complicated music poorly.”

It goes without saying that Church singing has always been an essential part of Orthodox worship. When we worship, we sing; when we sing, we worship! But we rarely think of Church singing in terms of reaching out to evangelize others, of generating new life within our parishes, and of sharing our rich legacy of liturgical music...

With surprisingly little effort, the average parish choir can host a concert of liturgical music which can promote the growth of the Church in a number of ways. To begin with, a concert can be an exciting event both for the parish choir and the parish community itself. It is the perfect opportunity for a

parish to “show off” its best qualities to the community in which it resides. Everyone can invite family, friends, neighbors, and co-workers – many of whom are likely to be unchurched or inactive – to attend a concert. It is not uncommon for those who have not attended services for years to attend a concert, feel spiritually moved by the music and the message conveyed, and materialize at the Liturgy the *next* Sunday. Choir members and parishioners often find it easier to approach other and ask them to come to a concert than to invite them to services. The environment is totally different – less *threatening* – making it easier for others to accept one’s invitation....

Musical settings abound and can vary widely as to the demands they place upon singers. Choose settings which are best suited to your choir and its particular *limitations and strengths* ... *It is better to sing simple music well* – and in a *prayerful manner* – than to sing complicated music *poorly* (this rule applies to liturgical services as well as concerts.) The audience should remember the message you are striving to convey rather than your performance.

From Fr. John Matusiak in *Church Growth and Evangelization*, OCA (1986), pp. 79-80.

St. John of Karpathos on Singing

2. David in one of his Psalms describes the praise offered to God by the whole of creation (cf Ps. 104). He speaks of the angels and all the invisible powers, but he also descends to the earth and includes wild animals, cattle, birds and reptiles. All of them, he believes, worship the Creator and sing His praise; for it is God’s will that everything He has made should offer Him glory....

14. It is written: “I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall come to all people” (Luke 2:10) - not just to some people. Again, it is written: “Let all the earth worship Thee and sing to Thee” (Ps. 66:4. LXX) - not just part of the earth. This singing is an expression not of grief but of rejoicing. Since this is so, let us not despair, but pass through this

present life cheerfully, conscious of its joys. Yet we should temper our gladness with the fear of God, keeping in mind the words: “Rejoice in the Lord with trembling” (Ps. 2:11). Mary Magdalene and the women with her ran from Christ’s tomb with both fear and great joy (cf Matt. 28:8); and perhaps we, too, shall one day come out from our spiritual tomb with fear and joy. I should be surprised if we were to do so without fear, for there is no one without sin, not even Moses or the Apostle Peter. But, at the time of the departure of such men from this life, God’s love proves victorious and casts out fear (cf. 1 John 4:18).

St. John of Karpathos, from the *Philokalia*, “For the Encouragement of the Monks in India Who Had Written to Him: 100 Texts” (7th century).

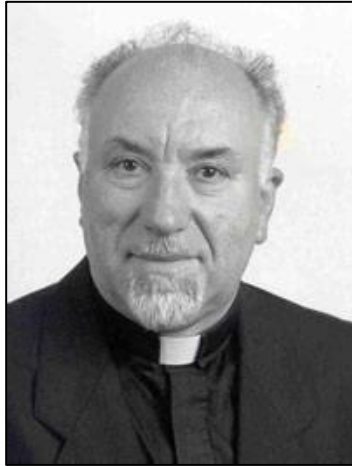


The Dynamics of Music in the Church by Archpriest Ion Bria

The entire life of the Orthodox Church is inspired and organized by the liturgy, the concelebration of the eucharist by the whole people of God. Its value lies not only in its beauty and solemnity, but even more in its ability, in the midst of history, to open the horizon of the kingdom of God for all humanity. Here history meets eschatology, church meets cosmos, sacred meets secular, redeemed meets unredeemed. The liturgy invites both Christians and non-Christians to this encounter between God and God's people in the name of Jesus Christ...

The celebrants (priests and deacons) should sing clearly and without hurry. Chanters and choir directors must understand the text to be able to explain its meaning to the singers; only then can they convey it concisely through the music to the faithful, thereby creating a prayerful atmosphere.

Gradually, but very carefully, unison chant might be introduced. However, this should not replace the normal repertoire. Congregational singing should



be encouraged whenever possible, especially responses to litanies, Trisagion, Creed, the Lord's Prayer. A common concern among the participants [is] the feeling that the singing of choirs or soloists in worship often becomes a performance. Liturgical singing should be sober and pure, but this should not be misunderstood as cold and joyless. The music must fit the words. The text should always be understandable and the melodies should follow the linguistic structure of the text. It should convey the inner sense of the holy word. Some music makes the text impossible to understand.

The practice of various forms – traditional and, if

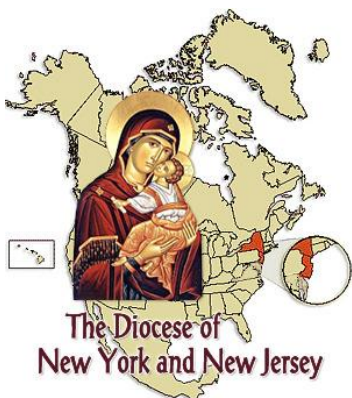
the occasion arises, new forms of monodic chant — are encouraged, although any ongoing practice in parishes must be respected.

Creativity is an organic part of human-divine reality. This affirmation of the free vocation of the human being reaches beyond the dualism between the Church and the world, faith and culture, the sacred and the secular. New music is part of this creativity.

A new generation of composers is becoming inspired by old melodies. They can offer a great contribution to the present-day Orthodox Church. Moreover, some well-known composers have written a number of symphonic works inspired by the beauty and power of the old chants. These religious melodies have an important impact on culture as a whole.

From Fr. Ion Bria, "Dynamics of Liturgy in Mission", *International Review of Mission*, 82/327 (July-October, 2003), p.325.

"The music must fit the words. The text should always be understandable and the melodies should follow the linguistic structure of the text."



Diocese of New York and New Jersey

His Eminence
 Archbishop Michael
 33 Hewitt Avenue
 Bronxville, NY 10708

Phone: 914-779-6580
Fax: 914-779-6581

Commission on Missions and Evangelism

Archpriest Eric G. Tosi, DMin
 1500 Route 376
 Wappingers Falls, NY 12590

Phone: 845-462-3887
Cell: 516-314-0836
Email: egtosi@gmail.com

We're on the Web!

<https://www.nynjoca.org>

St. Olympia Mission is Ready by Priest Paul Fedoroff

Our small mission parish is planning to move into an actual church building very soon. We hope to be worshipping in that new space early in 2021. It is an exciting time and a nerve-racking one as well. We are getting this new (to us) building because the original congregation could no longer support keeping it. That makes you take a step back and think - will we be able to support having this building?

Part of the reason that the previous owners *could* walk away from this building is that they will join a similar sister church down the road. Those parishes both agreed that there is no need to maintain two buildings so close to each other. And here is the reason why we *will* succeed: for the exact reason that we *cannot* just go down to the next closest church and worship.

We are *the only* Orthodox Church in

St. Lawrence County. St. Lawrence County is *the largest* county in our state. What a great opportunity! What an opportunity to build *the* Orthodox Church in America. We are not here to cater to a certain demographic or cultural group. We are here to bring Orthodoxy to everyone. Mix all the traditions that are here in this particular parish with whatever other cultural traditions are found in Orthodoxy and you get St. Olympia's Orthodox Church.



Covid will come to an end. People will be able to gather together as a community once again. Orthodox Christians will be able to worship and spread the Good News as we are meant to do. Even under the current restrictions, the new building will allow us to have more space for our worship. It will allow us to properly advertise

and reach out to the community. There is a mint condition working bell from the Civil War era in the tower, and there is a functioning food pantry in the basement.

We all need this church here. The people of this region need this church here. Of course, there is work to be done on the building itself. Mark your calendars for this summer. Our diocese has taken on projects like this in the past (see [Operation Pearl River](#) and [Operation Buffalo](#)). We will be ready for "Operation Potsdam" later this year.

How many people can we bring to the Orthodox Church this coming year? How many souls can we steer towards Christ? How many of us need to reinvigorate our own spiritual lives? God willing, we will be able to serve the north country by providing a place for proper, Orthodox worship. *St. Olympia, pray to God for us!*

P.S. Anyone know someone looking to buy a pipe organ? Maybe some pews?