
A Pastoral Weekend Infused With Music

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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On Monday, I spent some time at the hospital with a family whose husband and father has had a stroke. Every member of this family was a childhood friend of mine, and we were glad the man is showing marks of recovery. This family has known me since I was three years old. While we chatted, the wife asked me if I were still playing the piano these days.

About a half hour later, I was downstairs at the same hospital waiting with a family for their husband and father to emerge from surgery. One of the doctors, not the surgeon, dropped by to pay his respects. This doctor knows me well, too, and he remarked, "Well, I see you have the good reverend here, and there's a piano here, too. Maybe he can play while we wait." (I did not do so!)

What interested me about both these musical suggestions is that they occurred after I had spent the three previous evenings playing music of some sort or another. On Friday, I was a guest at a wonderful dinner party where the host had asked if I might provide a little after-dinner piano music. Both the host and the guest of honor were certainly worthy of my playing that night, and I did.

Then, on the next night, a Saturday, I took along my guitar to a going-away party. The wife of the man departing had asked that we have some sort of sing-along; and we did. We sang all sorts of old country and blue-grass songs, the old standards. Others in the room played piano, or other guitars, or flute, or harmonica. That kind of participation encouraged singers of all sorts! It did not escape me that, on that same night, our Cathedral Choir was also enjoying old standards; they were singing the songs of Cole Porter in Child Hall for their second annual Choir Gala.

On Sunday morning, the "Pickin' and Praisin'" team of musicians joined me at the Dean's Forum. That group of musicians offers music-again, the old country standards and popular praise songs-in the Cathedral Atrium two Sundays a month. It was fun to have them at the Forum, offering a chance for many people to pray in another way.

On Sunday, after our usual glorious services, I spent the day visiting neighbors and parishioners. One of the stops was at a Halloween Party, one of the great ones, that Boog and I do not like to miss. Toward the end of that lovely event, I was coaxed to sit at the piano again and play some jazz. This time, one of the other guests quickly moved over with his tiny trumpet. That trumpet was not a costume toy, as several people thought! From it, he produced beautiful melodies and jazz rifts. Old jazz standards and fast rhythms filled the room; the women were dancing.

Great stuff. On Monday, as people began to inquire about my own music, I wondered how many people actually do get together to sing anymore. At one time, songs were the mark of almost any social gathering. Today, we are guaranteed to sing together only twice a year: at birthday parties (one cute song) and at New Year's Eve (Auld Lang Syne, whose last lines usually disappear in a fog). At my local Rotary Club, we sing the national anthem once a week. Baseball season is over now; but few fans actually sing the national anthem there anyway (they do sing during the seventh inning stretch!).

Thankfully, it is in churches, and other houses of worship, where the practice of singing together still occurs regularly. I know that there are always folks who either do not sing or claim they cannot sing. But churches ought to be the places

where we always sing together, because churches are supposed to be places where the Spirit soars.

Music speaks to the soul in a different way than ordinary language does. Music requires breath and rhythm and melody. Good pastoral care occurs with music and singing; folks can be comforted in a way that goes beyond logic. This past weekend, in the midst of the routines of pastoral care, it was good to be reminded of the power of music. We'll sing again this Sunday! Join us this Sunday, All Saints' Sunday, when I can guarantee we will sing "For All the Saints" and "I Sing a Song of the Saints of God!"

Sam Candler signature



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