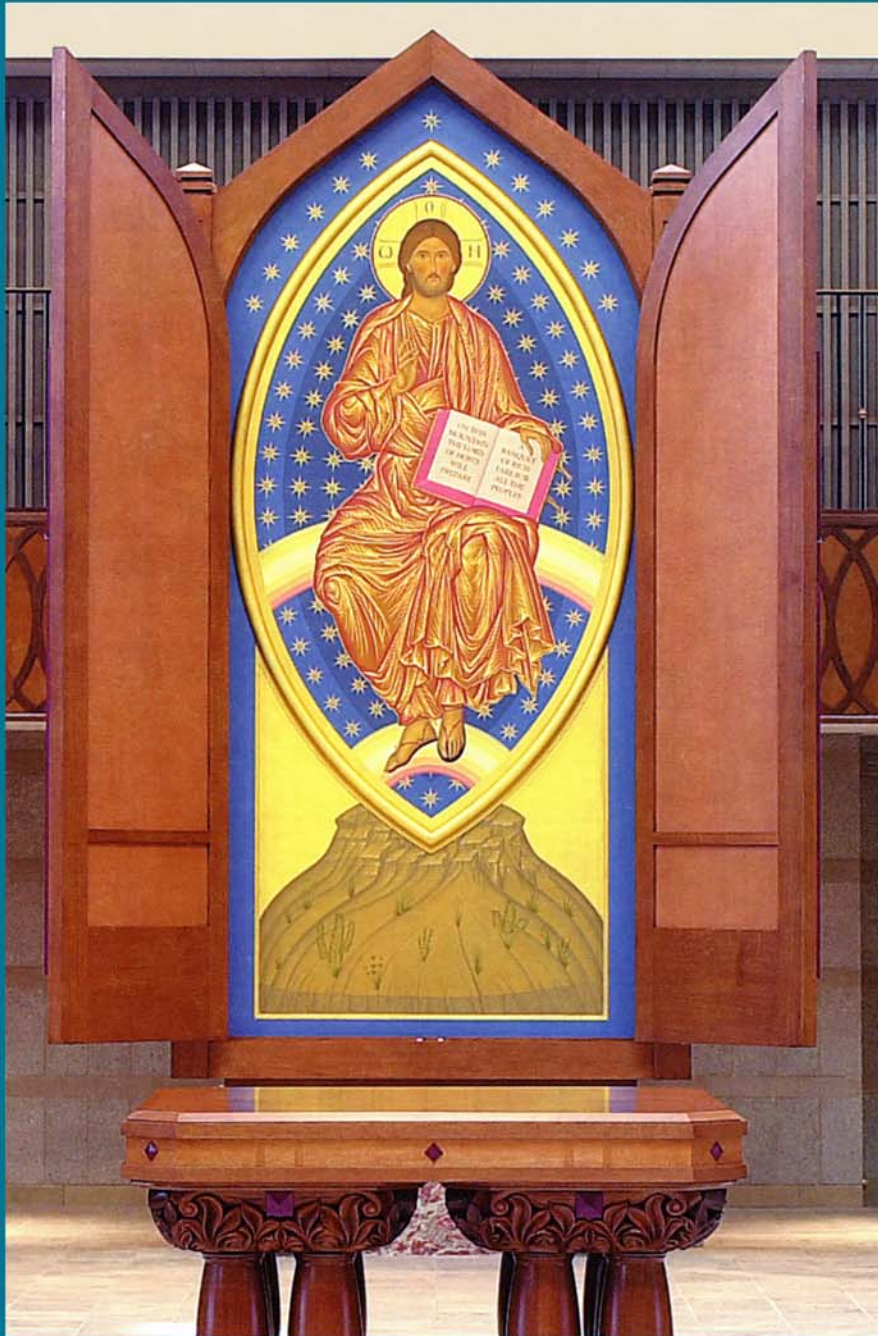


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Built of Living Stones

CONCERNS FOR PASTORAL MUSICIANS

In Built of Living Stones

Dennis Fleisher, Ph.D.

THIS NEW STATEMENT ON ART AND architecture for churches, chapels, and oratories of the Latin Church in the United States, issued by the authority of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, has as its stated purpose “to assist the faithful involved in the building or renovation” of Catholic places of worship.¹ It is also intended to offer guidance to architects, artists, liturgical consultants, engineers, builders, and other professionals engaged in the varied and diverse facets of a church building project.

In its opening chapter, *Living Stones* establishes its place in the context of other church documents that address art and architecture by stating that it “builds on and replaces” *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship* (no. 9, emphasis added). In some other areas, however, it defers to other extant documents, and for “planning appropriate space for musicians” it specifically cites and reasserts the validity of two staples of pastoral music literature, *Music in Catholic Worship* and *Liturgical Music Today* (no. 90). Despite such deference, it is now clear that *Built of Living Stones* is to be used as the primary guide for Catholic church building projects in the coming years.

This new document is not intended to be an exhaustive compendium of information for those involved in Catholic church building projects, i.e., it does not set out to be a handbook for the resolution of the complex liturgical, architectural, aesthetic, and pastoral issues that arise in the course of most building projects. Rather, in its 261

paragraphs, it offers “suggestions and guidelines” to serve as the basis for decision making at the local (parish and diocesan) level regarding art and architecture in Catholic church building projects. Furthermore, it suggests that these guidelines can become the foundation for the development of diocesan guidelines and legislation governing liturgical art and architecture. Moreover, the extensive footnotes provide an invaluable resource, directing the reader to supporting references in seminal and authoritative church documents.

Since Vatican II, and even more so in the past ten years, there has been a steady increase in the number of church building and renovation projects. And with this growth, there has also been a growing need for authoritative guidance to help address the complex issues and dilemmas that emerge in the course of these endeavors. But the most volatile issues (location of tabernacle, pews versus chairs, posture, communion rails, and the like) have, in recent years, become so divisive that they defy formulaic resolution. While this document does not, in general, resolve the most volatile issues, it does cite canon law on some matters and leaves other areas to the discretion of diocesan bishops.

A Less Contentious Area

While issues concerning music and music ministers are generally a less contentious area of church building projects, pastoral musicians will often find themselves embroiled in seemingly peripheral but

disquieting debates regarding the place of music and musicians in Catholic liturgy and in the Catholic church building itself. Who among us has not heard the occasional sentiment from a parishioner to put the choir back in the loft or that music is distracting from the liturgy? Yet the place of music in the liturgy has been reaffirmed in many church documents, perhaps most strongly in the new *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*² and Pope John Paul II's 1999 *Letter to Artists*.

Among the elements of church building projects addressed in *Living Stones*, there are many statements about music, and, therefore, it seems appropriate that pastoral musicians invest some thoughtful time in reading, studying, and understanding the entire document and, in particular, becoming conversant with those sections which address the music ministry. In the following paragraphs, I will present a summary of the major statements in the document that address pastoral music and discuss the major themes in the context of music ministry. I hope that this review will be a helpful introduction that initiates further study of the document by pastoral musicians, particularly if your parish is building a new church, renovating, or considering minor adjustments in the music ministry area.

You may already be wondering: What can a pastoral musician do about these diverse and complex issues? Isn't this more appropriately the domain of design professionals (architects, engineers, and acousticians)? Surely you have noticed that there are aspects to music making which, while obvious to us, are not understood by our parishioners, building committee members, or design professionals involved in building projects. Because of this special knowledge that pastoral musicians possess,

many professionals on church building and liturgy committees are now, more than ever before, welcoming pastoral musicians into the design process to help address the issues involved in making music for liturgy. When discussing music ministry concerns, one of the nation's most highly esteemed liturgical consultants put it this way: "What are the best locations for the music ministry? I recommend to you that, if you are renovating or building a new church, you answer this question first. Therefore, brought to the table are the people of the music ministry."³

Liturgical Principles for Locating the Music Ministry

"The Living Church" is the first of four chapters in *Built of Living Stones*. It is presented as "a theological reflection on the liturgy and liturgical arts and architecture." A key section of this chapter, subtitled "Liturgical Principles for Building or Renovating Churches," presents some well-established liturgical factors as guiding principles for the design of the body of the church and, within that body, the spaces for the various ministries that serve the liturgy. In this regard, the document is very clear *in concept* about the principles that should guide the design of the worship space:

A variety of ministries serve the assembly at the liturgy . . . As members of the Church, each person forms an essential and distinct part of the assembly that is gathered by God in an "organic and hierarchical" way. Each minister, ordained or lay, is called upon to fulfill his or her role and only that role in the celebration of the liturgy (no. 36).

By its design and its furnishings, the church reflects this diversity of roles. The one who presides, those who proclaim God's word, the ministers of music, those who assist at the altar, and members of the congregation all play

an integral part in the public prayer of the Church. The design of the church should reflect the unity of the entire assembly and at the same time insure that each person is able to exercise his or her ministry in a space that fully accommodates the ritual action called for by that ministry (no. 37).

The overarching principles here are that the form of the church should, by design, reflect the diversity of roles and “at the same time” the *unity* of the entire assembly. These principles are general in the sense that they apply to all ministries in the liturgical assembly, including the ministry of music. Yet it will already be obvious to pastoral musicians that, because of the different spatial and physical needs for music, these design principles will call for entirely different design strategies and design realizations to provide a space that fully accommodates the ritual action called for by [the music] ministry.”

A key to developing these concepts into a workable, buildable design hinges on two questions: (1) What, specifically, is included in the ritual action called for by the music ministry? and (2) What are the specific features of a church building that are necessary to accommodate that action? The first of these questions is addressed in the opening paragraph of a section in Chapter Two, subtitled “The Place for the Pastoral Musicians” (nos. 88-90): “Music is integral to the liturgy. It unifies those gathered to worship, supports the song of the congregation, highlights significant parts of the liturgical action, and helps to set the tone for each celebration” (no. 88)

The ritual action of the music ministry, then, is to make these things manifest in liturgy, i.e., to make their music and the music of the full assembly “integral to the liturgy.” Yet in so doing, the music ministry must be ever mindful of doing this in the context of the

gathered assembly, the abiding symbol of church:

It is important to recognize that the building must support the music and song of the entire worshiping assembly. In addition, “some members of the community [have] special gifts [for] leading the [assembly in] musical praise and thanksgiving.” The skills and talents of these pastoral musicians, choirs, and instrumentalists are especially valued by the Church. Because the roles of the choirs and cantors are exercised within the liturgical community, the space chosen for the musicians should clearly express that they are part of the assembly of worshipers (no. 89).

Clearly the special, God-given gifts of music ministers are to be employed in facilitating their ministerial role in the liturgy. But this is to be done while maintaining and fostering the image of assembly. This calls for a duality, a graceful dialogue of sorts wherein the ministers of music tread a fine line between membership and leadership (a liturgical concerto grosso of sorts). A parallel example of the dynamics here is the praying of the Lord’s Prayer. In the liturgy, the words leading up to this prayer are spoken by the presider alone. And, in initiating this communal prayer, the first words of the prayer are usually most strongly voiced by the presider. But, within a few words, the full assembly has joined in, and the voice of the presider is no longer the strongest voice; the presider’s role as leader is seamlessly transformed to a new responsibility as one member of the whole assembly. Many presiders will, sensitively, turn off their microphones or lower their voices to facilitate and strengthen this transition.

Practical Placement

With this liturgical focus on the gathered assembly as a guiding principle, it is often suggested that the music ministry can be placed as an integral part of the assembly seating, i.e., simply using a section of pews or chairs that might otherwise appear to be just another section of congregation seating. This concept evokes the appropriate imagery and symbolism, and it may, in fact, be done in certain settings, particularly when small numbers are involved. With a ten-voice choir, an acoustic guitar, a flute, and a 500-member assembly, this may be an entirely workable solution. But, with a thirty-voice choir, piano, organ, music stands, risers, and other resources for music ministry serving a 1,000-member assembly, the notion of a music ministry carved out of the assembly seating area becomes problematic and, often, altogether unworkable for several reasons:

- (1) All of the accouterments needed to make music can present substantial physical and visual impositions for the rest of the assembly;
- (2) The loudness level of such a large group of musicians is probably too great for assembly members seated in the immediate vicinity;
- (3) Surrounding the music ministry with the assembly members, and not sound-reflecting surfaces, eliminates beneficial and necessary sound reflections that would otherwise be provided by solid walls.

While *Living Stones* does not specifically address congregational and ministry size issues—a modern problem—it does so indirectly by explicitly situating itself in our

immediate milieu: It is a document intended for this place, this time, and this culture. “Catholics who live and worship in the United States in the twenty-first century celebrate a liturgy that is the same as that of earlier generations in all its essentials but significantly different in its language, style, and form” (no. 4).

One of the realities of Catholic worship in the United States at the beginning of the new millennium is that the overwhelming majority of new Catholic churches are larger than in former generations, and many renovations are done to expand seating capacity. Larger churches generally engender larger music ministries. With this in mind, and acknowledging the physical and practical limitations for large music ministries stated above, it may be better to pose the question of placement another way. We should not ask how we place the music ministry so that they are perceived to be part of the whole assembly, but how we place them in a setting that will facilitate their ministerial role with a minimum (ideally no) semblance of separation from the assembly.

The placement and prayerful decorum of the choir members can help the rest of the community to focus on the liturgical action taking place at the ambo, the altar, and the chair. The ministers of music are most appropriately located in a place where they can be part of the assembly and have the ability to be heard. Occasions or physical situations may necessitate that the choir be placed in or near the sanctuary. In such circumstances, the placement of the choir should never crowd or overshadow the other ministers in the sanctuary nor should it distract from the liturgical action (no. 90).

Another opportunity for locating the music ministry in a setting not contiguous with the congregation is suggested even earlier in the

document: “The ministers of music could also be located in the body of the church since they lead the entire assembly in song as well as by the example of their reverent attention and prayer” (no. 51).

The language here (particularly the word “could”) is noteworthy and emblematic of a consistent tendency in this document to allow for a variety of solutions and compromises in addressing the often hard-to-reconcile roles of pastoral musicians as ministers and assembly members. It is often extremely difficult to find one location that facilitates both equally, especially in large worship spaces.

While this review has not presented all the statements in *Living Stones* about the location of the music ministry, it is clear that the concepts of pastoral musicians as ministers to the assembly and at the same time members of the assembly have been carried over from *Environment and Art in Catholic Worship*. And, as in that earlier document, the specifics of how to implement this in a Catholic church building, new or renovated, are not clearly defined. Rather, as its opening statement affirms, *Living Stones* offers “suggestions and guidelines” to serve as the basis for decision making.

Configuring Music Ministry to Facilitate Music in the Liturgy

Quality and *appropriateness* were paired as a consistent and recurring value in *Environment and Art*; these same terms and their underlying concepts have been retained in *Living Stones*. These values should pervade all aspects of music production in the music ministry. But quality and appropriateness of music in the liturgy are not an automatic byproduct of good music

making. Two important factors are required in order to effect the perception of quality and appropriateness throughout the gathered assembly and, at the same time, facilitate the dual roles of musicians as ministers to and members of that assembly:

- (1) The sound of the music ministry must, at times, be sufficiently strong to be audible to the entire assembly but only to the extent of providing leadership, support, and encouragement to the assembly.
- (2) The sound must be able to recede, allowing the seamless synthesis of music ministry and the rest of the assembly as one (recall the example of the Lord’s Prayer above.)

The musical and acoustical factors involved here are dynamics and projection of sound. Let’s look at both factors in terms of *natural* sound, i.e., sound produced without amplification.

For a choir, dynamic variation can be produced either by effective vocal control or by varying the number of choristers. Even with a fifty-voice choir, there are opportunities to use a subset of the entire choir (soloists, duets, quartets, and similar subgroups) both for dynamic variation as well as coloration. For instrumentalists and ensemble musicians, the same principles apply, but there must be an awareness that the sound power of some musical instruments can exceed that of a full choir.

Effective projection of sound from the music ministry (again, in terms of natural sound) involves the placement of musicians where they will be backed by a sound reflecting surface. (Ideally this would also include sound-reflective side and overhead

surfaces.) This introduces a dilemma, for the ideal environment for a choir is a choral shell, and this is not an appropriate furnishing for a Catholic church. But, even putting aside the notion of a shell, there are some factors worth noting here.

One major difficulty in the Catholic worship space is that there is an almost universal aversion to anything connoting performance. This attitude is not strongly stated in *Living Stones*, though in discussing the congregation area, the following observations are made: “This area is not comparable to the audience’s space in a theater or public arena because in the liturgical assembly, there is no audience. Rather, the entire congregation acts” (no. 51). “Parishes will want to choose a seating arrangement that calls the congregation to active participation and that avoids any semblance of a theater or an arena” (no. 86). Judging by these statements, it may be that the oft-heard admonitions against “performance” by the music ministers are, in fact, directed as much or more so at the whole assembly. The congregation is to act, to participate, not sit back and be spectators.

While certain aspects of performance are obviously inappropriate in liturgy as an activity so focused on transcendence, there are artifacts of the performance environment that can actually support and enhance rather than detract from liturgy. The provisions on a concert hall stage are, at first glance, meant to draw attention to the performer(s) on stage. But those same provisions allow the performers or music makers to hear themselves, thereby facilitating the production of higher quality music. Those same provisions provide effective sound projection from music maker to music listener. And both factors are beneficial, whether the listeners are an audience or an

actively participating assembly. Both are beneficial whether the music maker is leading the listener or is one with the listener.

The bishops’ document offers sufficient latitude in language and interpretation to allow for the use of at least some, if not all, of the architectural features needed for musicians to make excellent music and to provide that excellent music with quality and appropriateness to the rest of the gathered assembly, whether the musicians themselves are, at any given moment in the liturgy, serving as ministers to or members of the assembly.

Sound Reinforcement

Note that my previous comments addressed “natural” sound, that is, sound without electronic amplification. This focus was chosen with a direct intent, because “it is important to recognize that the building must support the music and song of the entire worshipping assembly” (no. 89).

Most members of the assembly do not have microphones; their voices are supported by the natural acoustics of the worship space. Yet virtually all members of the assembly are served by the sound reinforcement system to some extent. In acknowledging this, *Built of Living Stones* offers two paragraphs on the use of sound reinforcement. The opening sentence of the first statement is concise and insightful (perhaps more so than the writers realized): “Another aspect of an effective audio environment is the electronic amplification system, which can augment the natural acoustics and can help to remedy problems that cannot be solved in other ways . . .” (no. 224).

Here, the importance of natural acoustics is

reemphasized, with sound reinforcement cast in a supporting role. But the overt acceptance of sound reinforcement to remedy acoustic problems acknowledges the existence of some consistent and increasingly more common acoustical challenges in the design of modern Catholic churches. First, our churches have become increasingly large; most new buildings are now designed to seat more than 1,000 people. That is a large body to address, especially for readers, lectors, and presiders, most of whom are not well trained in public speaking. That also applies to most pastoral musicians who, though gifted and dedicated musicians, are generally not trained performers.

Second, the shapes of our churches are driven by liturgical priorities focused on the gathered assembly. Those priorities generally call for keeping the members of the assembly as close to the altar as practical and allowing members of the assembly to see one another when seated. These priorities rule out long naves and shoebox-shaped buildings, forms known for their superior acoustical qualities. The modern trend is toward central-plan or generally round, square, or horseshoe-shaped seating areas. Note also (for those speakers and music makers) that there is generally no way to orient oneself to face the entire assembly directly; in many cases one is unable to face even the majority of the assembly. This design imposes limitations for natural sound projection as well.

Third (and perhaps most pertinent for the music ministry), by designing the worship space to express the image of the gathered assembly (while avoiding features that convey a sense of performance), communities offer few opportunities to provide architectural features for projecting sound from one precinct to the full assembly.

Considering these factors, one must conclude that sound amplification is a virtual necessity for projecting speech and music from ministry centers (*predella*, sanctuary, music ministry) to the rest of the assembly. Furthermore, amplification is needed for “monitoring” so that all ministers can hear themselves. But, even with the best components and a well-designed sound system, there are still difficulties in hearing oneself in the context of the full assembly and in controlling loudness. For pastoral musicians this poses some special challenges in making that seamless transition from a leadership role to blending with, becoming one in voice with, the rest of the assembly.

Clearly the technological, liturgical, and musical challenges here are substantial, and this fact has not been overlooked in *Living Stones*: “Providing for the amplification of the proclaimed and sung word and for instrumental and choral music is a complex task that demands the skills and experience of experts in the field of acoustical design” (no. 225).

While pastoral musicians must become more proficient in the use of sound systems, this document acknowledges that the engineering and acoustical design of these systems is an integral part of church design.

Other Topics

There are about twenty paragraphs in this new document that directly address music and sound. The primary focus in these paragraphs is on the location and configuration of the music ministry in the context of liturgical priorities as discussed above. But there are other music-related topics in *Living Stones* for pastoral musicians to study. Here are just a few more to invite further investigation:

The cantor, cantor's stand ("distinct from the ambo"), and singing of the responsorial psalm ("which normally occurs at the ambo") are discussed in paragraph 89. This same paragraph offers some guidance on the visibility of musicians: "In addition, cantors and song leaders need visual contact with the music director while they themselves are visible to the rest of the congregation." Note that while the visibility (to the whole assembly) of many liturgical items and ministers is cited throughout the document, including the visibility of cantors and song leaders, there is no specific recommendation about visibility of other members of the music ministry. This may be an oversight, or it may imply broader options in selecting locations that foster the dual roles of pastoral musicians.

Musical instruments (especially pipe organs) are discussed, but primarily with regard to space requirements and for suitable configurations so that singers, instrumentalists, directors, and cantors can see and hear each other (see nos. 226-227).

A Look to the Future

Built of Living Stones is a transitional document in a transitional time in Catholic Church history. It will take time for *Built of Living Stones* to be accepted and implemented in the design process for new church buildings. While it is likely that there will be continuing debates about its place in the hierarchy of liturgical documents, this text presents straightforward insights with a gracious range of interpretation for bringing the central principles of liturgical reform to fruition. With careful study and sensitive application, pastoral musicians can use the guidelines provided here to support and

enhance the role of pastoral music as a vital element of liturgy and a motivating force for the liturgical assembly.

Notes

1. *Built of Living Stones*, no. 3. This text is available on the USCCB web site at this address: (<http://www.nccbuscc.org/liturgy/livingstones.htm>) and in printed versions that can be purchased directly from the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops.
2. For a thorough discussion of liturgical music issues in the latest edition of the *General Instruction*, see Jan Michael Joncas, "Music in the General Instruction 2000," *Pastoral Music* 25:2 (December-January 2001) 22-28.
3. Quoted from a talk by Rev. Richard Vosko, "Environmental Factors of the Music Ministry" given at the Form/Reform Conference, Indianapolis, IN, 1996.

AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY

Dr. Dennis Fleisher has performed professionally as an orchestral and liturgical musician. After earning an interdisciplinary doctorate in physics, acoustics, and music from the University of Rochester and the Eastman School of Music, he has served the Catholic community since 1981 as a sound, music, and acoustics consultant. Dr. Fleisher currently operates MuSonics, an acoustics consulting firm, in Grand Rapids, MI. He can be reached at (800) 393-1315.