

Propositions for the Pastoral Programme

Some lines of Pueri Cantores spirituality

„Pueri Cantores is a movement of young people inside the Catholic Church. Their activity is embodied first and foremost through liturgical singing.

„As active members of a choir, children become actively immersed in liturgical action. Thus they experience both a personal and a congregational encounter with the divine, while at the same time helping the community itself to do the same. Liturgical education is realised by means of musical commentary on its texts and readings. This makes for a far better comprehension of various aspects of Christian spirituality.

A choir is a place where Faith is understood through sacred music. Singing in a choir helps young people to live truly adult, artistic and Christian lives”.

Document of Identification: *Mission of Pueri Cantores*, 2
cf. <http://www.puericantores.org/about-pueri-cantores,document-of-identification-of-pc>

I. Liturgical singing as the experience of faith

1. The formation of PC choristers commences at the very moment of their being admitted to a choir. The formative path takes on two dimensions: human and spiritual. It is so because a choir, following its own rhythm, creates its own specific climate to share with new members its musical, human as well as spiritual experience. These are the fundamental values, particularly for a liturgically active choir.

2. The spiritual experience of PC is supported by participation in the liturgy of the Church. Already the very stage of preparing chants adjusted to a particular celebration allows to reach the deepest meaning of a liturgical event, substantially different from the well-known events of social life. When a choir provides its singing service during liturgy, it cements its relationship with a community praying and share its faith with the participants.

3. The repertoire of liturgical chants is closely linked with liturgical formulas, with respect to both, texts and music. Liturgical chants are thus a rich source providing spiritual experience. Discovering a true value of liturgical singing signifies learning its content, the role which it plays in celebrating and the music which interprets it.

4. Liturgical chants are primarily the expression of faith. Sung by choristers during liturgy they may become the means to proclaim the faith. As St. Paul teaches us: “For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved” (Rom 10:10). Therefore, conscious singing becomes the profession of faith. It enriches spiritually singers although their faith may not be deepened enough. It is the grace of Christ through which human and spiritual growth is supported.

5. PC constitute a living part of the Catholic Church. The liturgical repertoire, both the past and contemporary, contains the experience of faith of the Universal Church. By performing the music pieces a choir enters into this experience, rich in human, artistic and spiritual respects. Immersed in the atmosphere of the Church, conscious of the possessed heritage, our choristers can develop spiritually both, as members of the international community of PC and as members of the Universal Church.

6. It is also important to involve a choir in a concrete community (parish) whose spiritual climate may help to engage all its members and stimulate the development of personal faith of individuals. By this means the whole choir, and each chorister as well, may find in such a surrounding a base for their own spiritual formation. As a result, service through singing will become more and more sharing one’s faith.

7. A great value is also the awareness of belonging to a big, international family of PC which lives around the whole world and is established on the same ideals. To make it more effective, perhaps it would be helpful to create a fundamental repertoire (basic) repertoire, mutual for all PC choirs. Each music piece of it might be then supplemented by a commentary explaining the meaning of chants performed during liturgical celebrations.

8. One of the characteristic features of PC spirituality is its connection with each Successor of St. Peter, seated in Rome. For that reason, in the entire cycle of international congresses one of them is always organized in Rome. The idea is to give PC an opportunity to meet the Pope and to pray by St. Peter’s tomb.

9. Thanks to young people singing during liturgy a praying community may find the image of angels and its thoughts are easily directed towards the Divine reality. This (innocent) singing helps to discern the presence of God and to praise Him with all one's heart.

10. When young people sing during liturgy they do it as a community of the faithful, entering into the life of the Church. They learn in this way how to take responsibility for one of the most profound moments of this life. They give as well a support in faith to other believers.

11. Singing of young people often makes us aware of the fact that by performing liturgical chants they proclaim the Good News. In this way they help the participants of liturgy realize more deeply the grace coming from above.

II. Living through experiencing Christ, my Saviour

1. In the life of the Christians the person of Christ is, in all respects, a fixed point of reference. He Himself is a true Mediator in getting to know a true God and this is Himself who helps us deepen our relationship with God-the Father. It is Christ as well who, along with His Father, brings us His Spirit who animates our relationship with God and with another man.

2. It is not enough to know something about Jesus Christ, or even about the whole Holy Trinity. A real development of man may be accomplished when he enters into a relationship with Christ, when he sincerely seeks the Saviour-Christ. The desire of this inner relationship is what everybody carries in themselves, yet it should be taken care of. St. Augustine said: "You stir us so that praising you may bring us joy, because you have made us and drawn us to yourself, and our heart is unquiet until it rests in you" (Augustine, *Confessions* I,1,1).

3. The formative path of PC spirituality might require the application of very important and suitable methods with a view to developing this side of a human heart. It is the basis for every optimism which should be attributed to young people. "Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice!" (Ps 105:3).

4. The pursuit of beauty, truth, freedom and happiness is the expression of God's presence in man. It is important to provide every opportunity so that each of our choristers would be able to develop this deepest desire. What is specially imperative here is to develop sensitivity to the value of beauty in the context of liturgy.

5. Sensitivity to the presence of God-the Saviour may be developed through listening to the Word of God. The Divine Word, proclaimed during celebrations, is a sign of the presence of God Himself. And its values, as explained through suitable catechesis, need to be highlighted. This requires the development of the ability to listen to the Readings, which is not easy, particularly among young people. It needs certain practice, attention directed to an ambo, respect shown to the Book of the Divine Word, etc.

6. We must convince our choristers that the most important meeting with Christ-the Saviour takes place in Sacraments. In is in them that Christ offers Himself to us, transforming us internally and fostering the development of our human and spiritual capabilities. By taking Christ in Sacraments we become more fully Christians.

7. Christ is also present among us in our relationships within our choirs. That is why experiencing friendship, cooperation, solidarity and sharing with what is good, always need to be connected with the Person of Christ who is the true source of it all. Conscious referring to Him will certainly help to build Christian relationships within a choir.

8. The employed methods should include those which allow to deepen the true meaning of religious singing, particularly liturgical. It is by means of liturgical singing that man may enter into the contact with a living Person of Christ acting in the Church. Liturgical singing can say much more than many words of teaching.

9. A PC choir provides service in the space of *sacrum*. Respecting this space – and it usually refers to churches – may help to cognize the Divine reality, so often present close to us.

10. Certain knowledge of liturgical ceremonial and its symbolic meanings opens man to *sacrum*. Consequently, musical service may clearly become more the service to Christ and the assistance in common praying of an assembly than an ordinary concert during liturgy.

III. Liturgical Year – to live and experience together with the Church

During the Liturgical year Christ appears Himself in various ways. By participating in liturgical celebrations we may not only learn better His Person and His message, but we can also experience Himself individually. A repertoire of sacred music, prescribed for various seasons of liturgical year, is a valuable instrument in this respect.

- 1. Advent** is the time when a Christian deepens his desire to live with Christ the Saviour. A mere knowledge of Jesus Christ does not suffice. An authentic Christian wishes to encounter the Saviour in person and he needs His presence in his life.

Themes for consideration:

- learning to listen to and sense the Word of God;
- prioritizing the chants which convey the desire to live with Christ-the Saviour.

- 2. Christmastide** helps to discover in which way Christ-the Saviour enters into the human history and how his coming influences and alters the lives of the believers.

Themes for consideration:

- humble coming of the Saviour;
- joy from discovering Christ's presence in various ways within a community of the faithful;
- Christmas hymns, Christmas carols – to help profess the belief in the fact that God became a real Man for our salvation.

- 3. Lent** is the time during which the Word of God calls us to reflect upon the way we live, to renew our relationship with God, that is, to converse, and to discover His role in our lives. We should look, in the light of God's Word, on the problems surrounding us, on the oppressing evil and fears which restrict our freedom.

Themes for consideration:

- renewing the knowledge of catechism;
- verifying one's own attitude to one's neighbours;
- developing the interest in one's own (Catholic) Church;
- analysing one's own means of testifying of Jesus Christ;

- verifying and strengthening religious practices to assure the living presence of Jesus Christ in our daily life (personal prayer, participation in the Holy Mass);
- chants encouraging a reflection upon one's own way of faithful life, upon the relationship with Christ-the Saviour (penitential hymns)

4. Eastertide. The paschal joy rekindles in hearts of the faithful a hope in conquering evil which we experience every day. Experiencing the holy baptism, renewed during paschal celebrations, as well as joy coming from them, produce a climate allowing to see our daily living from a new perspective. This makes the victory of Christ reverberate in the hearts of our choristers.

Themes for consideration:

- the significance of the Holy Baptism for me;
- paschal joy which we can experience during Easter celebrations;
- paschal joy which we can experience in our personal lives;
- chants about the Holy Baptism and Christ's victory.

5. Marian Feast Days. Mary sets a model of listening to the Word of God and accepting it by which means she could cooperate with God in the work of salvation. Invoking Mary during liturgy signifies getting closer to Her so as to learn from Her the attitude of faith.

Themes for consideration:

- learning how to say one's own „yes” to the Word we listen, following Marys' example;
- learning, with Mary, how to love Jesus;
- Marian chants – their significance.

6. Saints Feast Days. Solemn commemoration of saints is a vital part of the life of a Christian community. On these days great Christians from the past become present in our contemporary life. The role of liturgical celebration of Saints is not only to commemorate people from the past, but also to make us feel their presence today. Saints offer spiritual wealth through which they can comfort us as well. Therefore, we need to know our own patrons and “befriend” with them.

A particular role ought to be reserved for St. Dominic Savio, the Patron of our Federation. Each choir should also commemorate the patrons of their own parish church and their own individual patrons.

Themes for consideration:

- getting to know patron saints and their Christian qualities;
- chants to bring us closer to the Saints.

IV. Methods of spiritual formation

1. Preparation of candidates to sing in a church choir requires a long way of formation. Their musical abilities must be developed and their religious and human development ought to be enhanced as well. An important element of their formation is to make them open themselves to neighbours with whom they are going to serve and to the Church community. These well-developed relationships will naturally foster the human and religious experience.

2. It seems that one of the most important moments for our choristers is to discover that they do not only perform a certain music piece, but they can enter into experiencing the faith of believers, often of previous generations. In this way a chorister's service becomes a school of faith experienced through singing.

3. Learning singing techniques, a vital part of chorister's formation, may become as well as significant element of spiritual formation. Increasing one's singing skills requires a strenuous work under the guidance of a master. The latter must focus on aesthetic value of singing itself, and yet he/she must also exhibit its spiritual value, that is, to regard singing as a true profession of faith. Singing better and better during liturgy may signify giving a better and better testimony of faith. This effort may also make a chorister get more accustomed to perform his/her own social duties.

4. Explaining liturgical significance of singing opens up far horizons of the Christian experience. It allows to transform the mere text into an intelligent prayer. St. Paul clarifies this: "For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit may be praying but my mind derives no fruit from it. What then? I shall pray with the spirit, but I shall pray with the mind as well: I shall sing praises with the spirit and I shall sing praises with the mind as well" (1 Cor 14:14-15).

5. Singing during liturgy is an authentic prayer. By learning this man grows spiritually. It is thus crucial to encourage a personal preparation of each chorister towards both, their singing service and to their better understanding of the meaning of celebrations.

6. Some objectives to be achieved in spiritual formation:

- learning the meaning of singing and its role in the liturgy;
- developing personal engagement in singing (a desire to sing with one's heart);
- gradual deepening the meaning of celebrations;
- sensitising oneself to discern a true value of the Church community which prays, both at a local and universal levels;
- constant updating the vision of our commitment in a society (learning and exhibiting the cultural value of religious and liturgical singing).

7. Musical formation ought to be correlated with human and spiritual formation. The correlation of these elements must be specially cared for by a PC choir.

8. An important moment in the life of PC chorister is national and international congresses. They usually provide an occasion to convey certain subjects which may instigate a relevant catechesis in a choir. It seems advisable to propose such a catechesis also to those choirs which cannot directly participate in a congress. The subject, commonly approached by all choirs, encourages to build the community of PC in the world.

9. With regard to congresses, especially international ones, the ecclesiastical assistants should be given – if possible – together with the presidents (choirmasters) a chance to exchange their experiences. One of the best ways to guarantee this seems an Eucharistic celebration with a prayer for choristers and a brotherly meeting.

10. As believers and Catholics we cherish the presence of our Patron Saints, particularly the patrons of our parishes, churches and venues. For PC such a special Patron Saint is Dominic Savio (*1842 - +1857). In 1956 Msgr Maillet requested the Pope Pius XII to declare him a Patron Saint of the International Federation of *Pueri Cantores*. The major argument of the French priest, acknowledged then by the Pope himself, was an illustrious attitude of St. Dominic who wished to sing in a choir not for listeners' applause, but to please God alone.¹

¹ cf. Pius XII. Apostolic Letter *Carmina sacra* (8 June 1956): AAS 49 (1957) 199-200. M. Linnenborn. *Der Gesang der Kinder in der Liturgie*, op. cit., 297-299.

11. Cultural conditionings of each choir's environment require individual methods of spiritual formation of children, youth and adults, as well as their own means of cooperation with choristers' families.

V. Responsibility in spiritual formation

1. Spiritual life is born and develops thanks to personal experience of faith. Therefore, the very first responsibility we bear is the one for our own spiritual growth. Yet every person needs a suitable environment to facilitate this experience. Everyone needs a master, versed in providing guidance along the path of spiritual experiences.

2. A suitable environment to foster the growth of faith among PC is their own choirs, involved in the lives of their local churches.

3. The specifics of each choir requires that a choirmaster would be the first person responsible for its entire life, in all aspects. Therefore, he/she should care as well for spiritual formation of every PC chorister.

4. Spiritual formation is an individual thing for every believer and is often a challenging task. For that reason, the first and closest collaborator of a choirmaster in this field ought to be an ecclesiastical assistant. The support is needed for devising methods to create and develop the environment suitable for spiritual progress. It should never be forgotten that a great obstacle in choristers' formation is lack of harmonious cooperation between a choirmaster, ecclesiastical assistant, choirs' associates and choristers' parents.

5. The presence of an ecclesiastical assistant ensures the union of a choir with the Church structures. The Ecclesiastical Assistant of the International Federation ought to be approved by the Apostolic See: the Dicastery for the Laity, Family and Life. An Ecclesiastical Assistant of a national federation is appointed by the proper episcopal conference. An Ecclesiastical Assistant of an individual choir is appointed by a choirmaster upon consultation with local church authorities.

6. An Ecclesiastical Assistant of a national federation, in collaboration with the President, ensures spiritual animation within a given area. Their role is to encourage each choir to have its own ecclesiastical assistant. It is advisable to develop methods of cooperation among ecclesiastical assistants on a national level.

7. An Ecclesiastical Assistant on an international level takes care of preserving the spiritual heritage of PC and renewing it in the light of Church teaching. He is also obliged to stimulate spiritual formation on the international level, take care of spiritual preparation for international congresses and tend the relationship between the Federation and the Holy See.

VI. Bringing hope to modern man.

1. Hope represents one of human features which allow us to overcome various problems, our limitations and our weaknesses. To us, the believers, a true hope comes from our cognition of and our relationship with Christ-the Saviour. It is born and strengthened through listening to the Word of God and through our personal experience of the Sacraments. The hope, which we experience through singing during the liturgy, is the one which we want to share with our brothers.

2. According to the Catechism, hope gives a possibility of attaining salvation and reaching eternal life. Promoting this value in the modern world may be expressed in two ways. On the one hand, through singing religious and liturgical pieces as a legacy of many-centuries Christian experience. On the other hand, through PC singing a hope which is born in their young hearts when they offer their liturgical service in the Church community. In this way their presence and their singing become a true message of hope.

3. Nonetheless hope is not a value only for ourselves. It grows in the hearts which share it, which pass it on to others. That is why our formative programme should include also this great value of our Federation's heritage. The flame of hope which burns in our hearts can only be shared and rekindled in the relationship with a society. In our encounter with the society PC must appear as people full of hope.

4. Since its early beginnings PC have actively engaged in building a real peace among societies and in the world. A beautiful manifestation of this engagement is a prayer for peace which is a fixed point of each Congress programme, both national and international. It was Msgr Maillet who encouraged PC to unite their forces so that all children of the world would sing God's peace. It is the legacy reminded as well by the Pope Saint John Paul II in his address to PC in 1993².

5. PC carry as well their love for beauty. They learn about the criteria of the centuries-old experience of the praying Church.

6. The presence of a singing choir at church is an offer for society as well. Wherever the only cherished value is competition, a choir discovers the beauty of cooperation in the name of Christ.

7. In our society, so much accustomed to transient values, to the criteria advanced by promoters of show business, the offer made by a choir performing classical repertoire may provoke even negative reactions. Yet our task is to value the treasure of our Church tradition and to propose it wisely, not being discouraged by certain forms of short-lived fashions.

8. The Popes of our times have envisioned the role of PC both within the Church and within secular structures of societies. John XXIII described the presence of young singers in liturgical celebrations as the dawn and hope of life. In the innocent eyes of young singers he saw a reflected God's plan for each of them. The source of power to realize this plan is always the Eucharist³.

9. Pope Paul VI compared liturgical service of PC to the Easter Alleluia. This implies that PC are the proclaimers of the new hope which allows to understand how beautiful it is to sing with the Church and for the Church⁴. He emphasised the value of vibrant, clear and innocent voices as attributable to children⁵.

10. According to Pope John Paul II the service of PC is a constant singing hymns to God, along with the Blessed Virgin Mary, since one's youth until „the hour of our death". Praise of Mary is one part of this service⁶. PC singing and music best manifest the true dimension of

² John Paul II, *Address to PC at 26th International Congress* (31 December 1993).

³ John XXIII, *Address to the Participants of 8th International Congress of PC*, 1 January 1961.

⁴ Paul VI, *Address to the International Federation of Pueri Cantores*, 6 April 1964.

⁵ Paul VI, *Address to the Participants of 11th International Congress of PC*, 10 July 1967.

⁶ John Paul II, *Angelus Address*, 1 January 1988.

human nature. Therefore, PC are real messengers of harmony and peace⁷. They are the messengers of faith as they do not only assist participants of liturgy to pray but they also help them with their singing to turn to God⁸.

11. Pope Benedict VI⁹ defines the role of PC as an important mission in the service to the Lord, helping the participants of liturgy to nourish their faith and raise their minds to God, so that they could remain in a redemptive dialogue with Himself¹⁰.

12. Pope Francis¹¹ reminds PC that their singing lifts the spirit and fosters positive emotions. He quoted the words of St. Augustine: “Sing and walk!”

Cracow, 8 May 2017

While collecting the above material I used the following sources:

The Document of Identification: *Mission of Pueri Cantores*

(cf. <http://www.puericantores.org/about-pueri-cantores,document-of-identification-of-pc>)

and the suggestions I received from Ecclesiastical Assistants from various countries. “The Propositions...” have also been consulted with the Board of Directors of FIPC.

A great help for me was the valuable book written by Rev. Marius Linnenborn, the Ecclesiastical Assistant of the German Federation of PC:

M. LINNENBORN. *Der Gesang der Kinder in der Liturgie. Eine liturgiewissenschaftliche Untersuchung zur Geschichte des Chorgesangs*, Verlag Friedrich Pustet – Regensburg 2010; =Studien zur Pastoralliturgie 26.

My propositions are to encourage the collection of everything which constitutes spiritual value of the International Federation of Pueri Cantores.

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⁷ John Paul II, *Address to PC at 26th International Congress*, 31 December 1993.

⁸ John Paul II, *Address to the Participants of the Congress organised by the International Federation of Pueri Cantores*, 31 December 1999.

⁹ Benedict XVI, *Address to the Participants of the International Congress of Pueri Cantores*, 30 December 2005.

¹⁰ cf. SC 7-8. 112. 33.

¹¹ Francis, *Address of His Holiness Francis to the Participants of the 40th International Congress of Pueri Cantores*, 31 December 2015.