

# Mentoring Youth into Music Ministry

---

---

---



**O**livia Buthod got interested in playing the organ because her older brother was studying organ and piano, and as a child she “tried to do everything my older brother did.” She is currently finishing her undergraduate music studies at The Catholic University of America. Justin Gough started piano lessons at the end of first grade as a summer activity. Now a freshman at Calvert Hall College High School, he is the interim director for the contemporary ensemble at his parish near Baltimore, Maryland. Rebecca Strong’s first piano teachers were her parents and her sister; she is now in high school and is a member of her parish choir in Sewickley, Pennsylvania. Bryan Schamus was available to minister musically to the students at Virginia Tech on April 16, 2007, because he had joined the choir at Christ the Redeemer Church in Sterling, Virginia, when he was in high school. Marguerite Christensen started playing piano when she was five years old, but she moved to studying the organ when she saw her music director playing that instrument. Evan Snyder got interested in church music because his mother was a choir member at Blessed Trinity Church in Frankenmuth, Michigan. Now in college, he attributes much of his understanding of liturgy and liturgical music to participation in the summer National Catholic Youth Choir program at St. John’s University in Collegeville, Minnesota, and especially to the Music Ministry Alive! program at the University of St. Thomas in St. Paul, Minnesota.

**W**hat does it take to mentor young people into music ministry? It begins with example, especially the example of good sung liturgy; the participatory example of adult congregations fully engaged in singing the liturgy; and the example of well-trained, thoughtful, and supportive pastoral musicians who are willing to work with and encourage young people. Most people in music ministry today were involved in music ministry while they were

growing up. Their music skills were nurtured, and their musical gifts were encouraged by the parish musician. They learned that music—particularly singing—is integral to Catholic worship.

Like all of us, pastoral musicians are shaped by experience. Parishes can provide formative experience to young people by involving them in children’s choir and apprentice cantor programs, by making them apprentice organists, or by incorporating them into musical ensembles. Choir directors have the most practice at recruiting young people, and many parishes have “stepping-stone” choirs that involve very young children, then move them into a choir of older children, a teen choir or vocal ensemble, and then into the adult choir. Organists also have access to recruitment and training programs, and some parishes offer modest scholarships to students who want to study with the parish organist or another local teacher.

When children and youth are mentored in music ministry, good things happen. As active participants in liturgy, these young people gain an appreciation for their baptismal dignity as participants in divine worship, and they experience the joy to be had in worship. They learn what creativity is by being active, involved, and goal-oriented, and they learn how to be leaders. They learn about the liturgy, its rites, and the seasons and feasts.

Above all, young pastoral musicians need encouragement. They need people to appreciate their dedicated service and to commend their artistry. They need people to support their studies vocally, monetarily, and in other ways. They need opportunities to minister to the congregation and to learn by doing (and, sometimes, by failing). They need people working with them so that they have a firm foundation and good direction. They need you, for you could be the person who makes a difference in ensuring that there will be people to undertake this “integral” ministry in the future “for the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful” (Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 112).