



Catholic Review

Inspiring the Archdiocese of Baltimore

Youthful voices fill Baltimore Basilica with sacred song



More than 50 voices of young singers filled the chambers of the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary in Baltimore with sacred songs March 12. (Todd Karpovich/Special to the Review)

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More than 50 young vocalists from different Catholic schools and parish youth choirs in the Archdiocese of Baltimore and neighboring dioceses were part of the special events sponsored by the American Federation Pueri Cantores March 12. The singers also included students from the St. Mary's Seminary and University Schola in Roland Park.

"We have been hosting annual Pueri Cantores Festivals in different cities in the Mid-Atlantic region for the past 10 years, and this is our first time in Baltimore," said Kathleen Prina, program director for the American Federation Pueri Cantores. "Right before COVID shut down our nation, we were scheduled to have the festival at the basilica with Archbishop William E. Lori as celebrant in March of 2020. We were disappointed to have to cancel the event so suddenly, an event that choir directors and their singers had been preparing for months." Because of the ongoing pandemic, the festival wasn't able to be held in 2021 either, she said.



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Pueri Cantores is the national student choral organization of the Catholic Church, and in partnership with St. Mary's Seminary and University, organized the festival and Mass for children in grades 4-12 from many local Catholic schools and parish youth choirs.

"Most of the festivals we have done in this area have been in Washington, D.C.," AFPC board member David Niccolini said. "This has been four years in the planning."

Choirs from St. Mary's Seminary and University Schola, Divine Mercy Academy (Pasadena), Linton Hall School Choir (Bristow, Va.), Epiphany Catholic School Schola (Culpeper, Va.), Oakcrest Lower School Choirs (Vienna, Va.), and the St. Bernadette Youth Choir (Silver Spring) participated in the march 12 event.

Other choirs that were scheduled to participate but could not attend due to a late winter storm were the Jubilate Singers (Severna Park) and St. Francis de Sales Catholic Church Youth Choir (Purcellville, Va.)

Julia Murray, 9, sings with the St. Bernadette choir and just started singing this year. She took a moment to soak in the environment of the historic Baltimore Basilica.

"I am a little nervous," she said.

Fellow singer Thomas O'Connor, 13, of the Divine Mercy Choir, was excited to be singing among the group.

"We definitely had a lot of practice," O'Connor said. "I am really sure we have it down."

Archbishop Lori is a great supporter of Pueri Cantores, and with his blessing, he suggested that the group host an annual festival in Baltimore at the Basilica with him presiding over the festival Mass.

"Thank you for the beauty and song you share with us," Archbishop Lori said at the Mass.

AFPC also has a partnership with St. Mary's Seminary and University, and so with all of the relationships in Baltimore, it made sense to have the festival at America's first cathedral. The archdiocese had the opportunity to hear directly from the young men of faith from St. Mary's as each briefly talked about his discernment and vocational choice of religious life. At the vigil Mass, the seminarians joined voices with the children and combined them into one choir to sing to God from the church's rich historical repertoire.

"While this might be a new first for AFPC, we believe that it will not be the last," Prina said. "We are committed to showcasing these strong examples of faith to God to the children of the church for years to come and across this great nation."

The combined choirs were led by a nationally recognized Catholic conductor/educator, Dr. Richard Robbins. The festival day typically lasts seven hours with three rehearsal periods, lunch/snack breaks, opportunities for the singers to interact with their peers, and then culminating with the festival Mass.

“Nerves can be a normal part of the singing experience,” Prina said. “However, because the participating choristers join together with their peers to create one large combined ensemble, it gives singers the comfort and poise to use their voices confidently. Also, these events are not performances, but rather, they are an opportunity for these young choristers to use their voices to enrich the Mass and worship God through the beautiful and historical sacred music of our Church.”

More information about Pueri Cantores is available at www.pcchoirs.org.



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By [Todd Karpovich](#)

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