

Voices of Peace



Pope Benedict XVI with singers during a rehearsal at the *Sala Nervi*, Dec. 30, 2010.

COURTESY OF L'OSSERVATORE ROMANO

U.S. choirs sing for papal Mass during international music festival in Rome

Daniel Medinger

When Pope Benedict XVI celebrated the World Day of Peace Mass Jan. 1, St. Peter's Basilica resonated with a special melodious, international sound. That's when youth choirs from around the world, including 20 from the United States, gathered in song and worship to ring in the New Year.

The U.S. choirs, made up of more than 600 singers ages 9-18 from Catholic schools and parishes, were in Rome to participate in the 36th International Congress of Pueri Cantores, which began on Dec. 28. This year's delegation to Rome was the largest group ever from the United States.

One highlight of the congress was

an international choir rehearsal at the 9,000-seat papal audience hall located near St. Peter's Basilica that united about 4,500 singers from 18 countries. Entering to the enthusiastic cheers of the singers and their families, Pope Benedict XVI spent 45 minutes listening to music, greeting singers and leaders from the countries represented and addressing the audience in the six languages used throughout the event.

Julia Frohlich, an eighth-grade student from St. Mary Margaret School in Winter Park, Florida, who sat onstage with the pope, said, "My body went numb from my head to my toes!" Taylor Rotz, fifth-grader, also from Winter Park, said, "I sang with all of my heart."

Conductor Cristyn Schroder summarized the Vatican experience this way: "The biggest thing this accomplished for the students was realizing the universality of the Catholic Church and the binding force our music and liturgy play in that role. It's a doorway to friend-

ship, light and love through Jesus."

In addition to extra performances in local churches and community locations, the choirs sang Christmas and liturgical music—including Gregorian chant and 20th century compositions—at four events in four days. The U.S. choirs sang for a special Mass of the Nations at the Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls. A stunning church the size of four football fields, this basilica originally was constructed by Constantine to house the remains of St. Paul, who is buried beneath the high altar.

Lee Gwozdz, whose 100-voice youth choir from Corpus Christi Cathedral in Corpus Christi, Texas, served as organist for the Mass. American Federation of Pueri Cantores (AFPC) President Patrick Flahive conducted the singers.

The Pueri Cantores San Gabriel Valley choir from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles, also under the direction of

The pope greets Pueri Cantores singers in the Vatican, Jan. 1.

Flahive, was selected as one of the 10 best choirs and participated in the gala concert at St. Mary Major, one of the Eternal City's four basilicas. The choir was joined by nine other choirs from as many national federations.

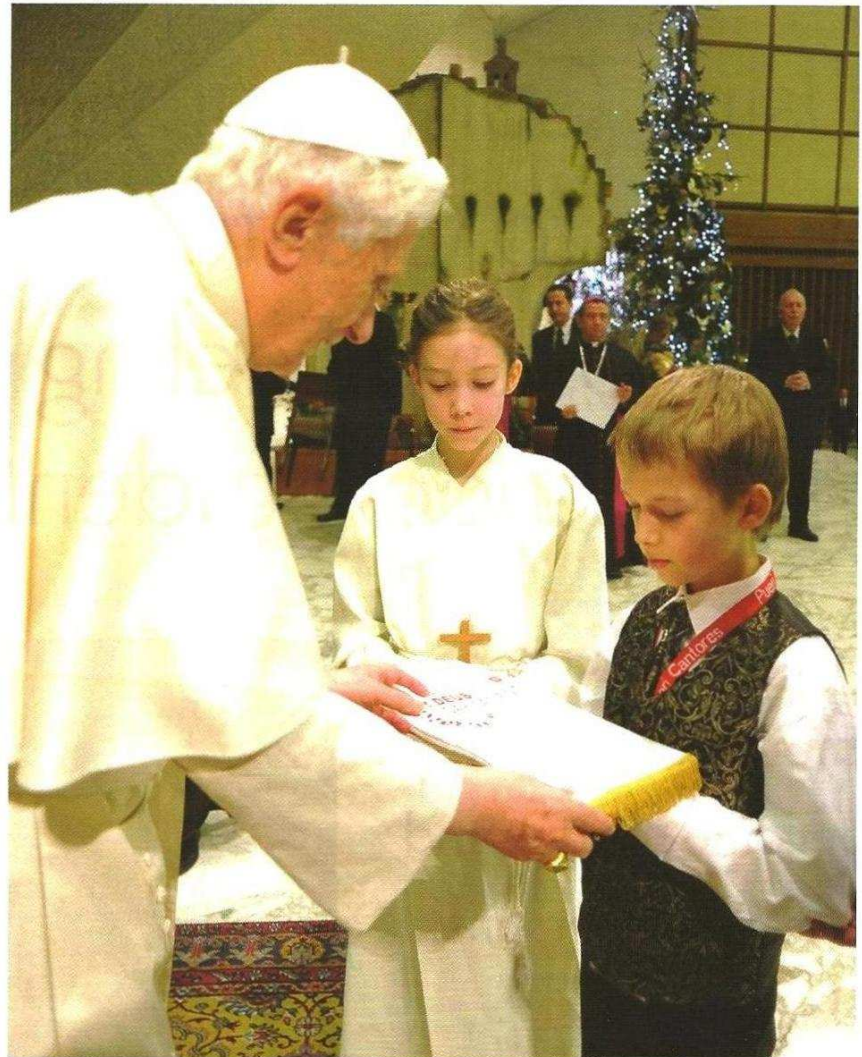
"When the kids from these choirs sing together it's an international embrace through sacred music," said Flahive, who has led his choir to seven international festivals. "We do this to show that we're all brothers and sisters in Christ and the music allows us to do that in one voice."

Pueri Cantores, founded internationally in 1944 and started in the United States in 1953, is headquartered in the Vatican and serves as the official student choral organization of the Catholic Church. It promotes excellence in the singing of high quality liturgical music in the liturgy, and promotes world peace through its music. The American Federation is the second largest worldwide and sponsors regional annual festivals and Masses that serve 72 U.S. dioceses.

Pueri Cantores also sponsors an annual conductor seminar each July designed especially for directors of Catholic middle and high school choirs. Presenters include national authorities on various aspects of choral development and continuing professional development units are offered at no cost to teachers. In addition to 12 regional festivals, the conductor seminar and other events, the United States will host the Pueri Cantores International Congress on July 4, 2013, in Washington D.C.

U.S. choirs participating in the international festival in Rome were:

- Academy of Our Lady of Mercy, Milford, Connecticut
- Archdiocesan Children's Choir, St. Louis, Missouri
- Cathedral Youth Choirs, Corpus Christi, Texas
- Chorus Angelorum of St. Francis of Assisi, Concord, California
- Coro de Concierto, Academia Cristo Rey, Ponce, Puerto Rico



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- Golden Gate Boys Choir, Hayward, California
- Holy Family Children's Concert Chorus, Glendale, California
- Pueri Cantores Pilgrimage Choir, Santa Cruz, California
- Pueri Cantores San Gabriel Valley, Covina, California
- Queen of Martyrs Choristers of Evergreen Park, Evergreen Park, Illinois
- Serra Catholic School Choir, Rancho Santa Margarita, California
- St. Anthony Choristers, San Antonio, Florida
- St. Cecilia School Choir, Tustin, California
- St. David Catholic Festival Choir, Davie, Florida
- St. Francis of Assisi Middle School Choir, Ann Arbor, Michigan
- St. Jane de Chantal Choir, Bethesda, Maryland
- St. Margaret Mary School Choir, Winter Park, Florida
- St. Mary's Children Choir, Chicago, Illinois
- St. Richard Youth Choir, Jackson, Mississippi
- Walsingham Academy Madrigals, Williamsburg, Virginia

Religious media and Web sites have made the music from the congress available through Vatican Radio and TV and the U.S. Catholic network EWTN. Other postings can be viewed on Facebook and the American Federation Pueri Cantores Web site www.pcchoirs.org.

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