



The Director's Message

By: Fr. Paul Gallagher, OFM



Fr. Paul Gallagher (Order of Friars Minor, Sacred Heart Province) uses music to consistently enhance his prayer life.

There is a part of me that would like to be a musician. In high school, I signed up for band. When I dropped the trombone after my freshman year my parents told me they were relieved. Through my years of the seminary, when we formed choirs for Christmas or Easter, I was reminded that I had a server's voice.

Nonetheless, I have found through the years that music has consistently enhanced my experience of prayer. Whether it is music as part of Mass, or just playing in the background as I sit in the quiet of the morning while go through my morning prayer rituals; music seems helps me be in touch with fuller part of me and bring that to God.

My favorite uses of music have been a monthly Taize prayer service outside of Chicago. The first Friday of the month a couple of hundred, from all walks of life and denominations, gather for one hour prayer and meditation. The simple Taize chants, reading of Scripture, and quiet meditation became a staple for my spiritual life while I lived in Chicago. Another is more private and personal. I have a play list with my favorite songs that remind me of my relationship with God. Most of them would be classified as religious, but not all. Most nights, as I turn off the lights, I set them to play softly in the background as I fall asleep. Sometimes I am aware of the words of

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Our E-Newsletter:
The focus of this issue is on ways music can enhance personal prayer. Several people share their experiences.

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the songs, but mostly I just let them remind me that even in the night I go into the presence of God.

Aware of my own experience of how music can enhance my own sense of prayer, I have asked other people to share their experience how they use music in their prayer. I tried to get a variety of people from different musical backgrounds to share their experience. Hopefully they will help to widen our appreciation of the value of music in prayer and give us some suggestions or reminders.



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Can Music Be Prayer?

By: Fr. Dennis Schafer, OFM

This past weekend, I traveled 5 hours each direction to a meeting. Alone in the car, I followed my eclectic musical tastes with opera, country, Christian pop, sacred choral music and Gregorian chant. The music kept me entertained and awake as I drove through Wisconsin and Illinois. Rarely did it move me to pray. So how does music help one pray?

The first thing is intention. I was intent on moving, not on talking with or listening to God. The second is awareness. My music was in the background while I focused on driving skills. The third is choice. I pretty much mixed it up to keep things interesting.

So, how do you prepare for praying? Music can help us turn away from those things that demand our attention so that we can focus more easily on God. For me, this is usually quiet music without much dynamic change or complex harmony, and it also usually has a slow tempo. Instrumental music from Taize is an example. Because of this, my heart rate and breathing slow down. I am able to let go of, or at least put aside, my worries by entrusting them to God during my prayer. You have to decide for yourself, but once I have quieted, I have to turn off the music or it becomes the center of my attention.

Additional Web Resources

The intention of the E-Newsletter is to provide a resource for the spiritual life and a place for people to share their personal experience, which serves as a spring board for others. We invite your comments, suggestions, and personal reflections. Use the following links to start a thread on our [Community Forums](#), or to send us an [email](#). In addition, we have [additional articles](#) on our website for your spiritual nourishment.

**COMMUNITY
FORUMS!**



Fr. Dennis Schafer (Order of Friars Minor, Sacred Heart Province) uses music to carry prayer throughout the day.

I also use music to help focus my intention. If I want to thank God, express repentance or seek forgiveness, intercede for others, or express praise; I might begin prayer with a musical setting of a text that expresses my intention. I might even extemporize my own singing of a text. This might happen throughout my prayer (especially if I am alone!).

Finally, when I am concluding prayer, I might choose a piece of music which continues the mood or thought of my prayer. It helps to have a collection of favorites near at hand so you don't have to go looking. I sometimes find that songs or instrumental music I know will arise from within while I am praying, and that music is a natural tool to carry my prayer throughout the day.

So, I conclude by saying that whatever music helps you pray is good music for you. Music helps us express and develop our emotional lives, an important aspect of our life with God.

Peace and all good!

Spring at IL RITIRO



*O, cease to heed the glamour
That blinds your foolish eyes,
Look upward to the glitter
Of stars in God's clear skies.
Their ways are pure and harmless
And will not lead astray,
Bid aid your erring footsteps
To keep the narrow way.
And when the sun shines brightly
Tend flowers that God has given
And keep the pathway open
That leads you on to heaven.*

– Robert Frost

Explore Music As Prayer

By: Sr. Marlene Geppert, OSF

The Easter season is the time of year where it is just natural for our hearts to sing a happier tune. Music abounds in nature with flowers budding and birds singing. Therefore, it is fitting, especially during this glorious season, to explore how music can be used to help bring you to the next level of your spiritual life and your relationship with God.

Think about how many times music has been able to pull you “out of the everyday” to a near contemplative state. The worries of the world seem to be set aside as we let our minds and our hearts go with the flow of the tunes. Given this, is there any wonder that music can be an effective tool in helping us grow in prayer and spirituality?

You may be wondering how you can add music to your spirituality to help foster your relationship with God, to explore who you are in Him, and discern who He wants

Accepting Music As A Gift

By: Sr. Regina Rose Pearson

For centuries, the influence of song has resided in the hearts and souls of humankind. Few things in my life have had the power to move me like a reflective melody, an engaging ballad, or a steady beat. Music has always played a significant role in my life and in my prayer.

As a child, I watched and heard my parents express a rich life of faith and prayer but found myself at a loss as how to voice my own feelings to God. My words seemed insignificant and my thoughts too scattered. I quickly found that, when I met with the challenge of opening my heart to God or of finding focus in prayer, music became an avenue of grace. It had (and still has) the ability to create an atmosphere of calm for me, a



God can touch our heart and soul through the music of nature as well, such as the wet weather babbling brook at Il Ritiro.

you to be. If so, we invite you to attend the upcoming Rocking Chair retreat. On this retreat, you will spend a day communing with God while enjoying peace and serenity. The group will explore various forms of prayer, including music and song; as well as, guided imagery, Lectio Divina (praying with scripture), meditation, and contemplation. There will also be time to reflect and share with others, relax in a rocking chair, and take a walk on the trails and roads in a lovely nature setting. Learn how the depths of your soul can be explored through the power of music.



Sr. Marlene Geppert (Franciscan Sisters Of Our Lady Of Perpetual Help) will lead the Rocking Chair retreat as attendees explore their spirituality through music and other forms of prayer.



Sr. Regina Rose Pearson (Franciscan Sisters of Christian Charity) reflects on the gift of music in her spirituality.

backdrop in which to place my mind and heart. I experience a very real reaction to music, and it seems to me that the sounds often resonate with the movements of my spirit and the rhythm of my life.

Music, I think, is intrinsically connected to emotions, lending itself readily to the lifting of the soul and easily touching the heart of the listener. It is a universal language; able to penetrate the whole being. It is also a mediator between the spiritual and temporal. As I grow older, I learn that, if you are attuned to it, music is a gift that can be found most anywhere and no matter where you find it, it has the power to change hearts and souls.

Upcoming Retreats

<u>Retreat Name</u>	<u>Date</u>
<u>Contemplative Outreach Association Annual Spring Retreat</u>	Apr 10-12
<u>Rocking Chair Retreat</u>	Apr 18
<u>Keeping Our Faith Lives Fit: A Day for Law Enforcement & Fire Personnel</u>	May 2
<u>Retreat into the Universal Story (for women)</u>	Jul 5-10
<u>A Day of Reflection with Sophia, Divine Wisdom</u>	Sept 26
<u>Contemplative Outreach Association 7-Day Post-Intensive Retreat</u>	Oct 12-18

Private Retreats Can Be Scheduled Anytime

IL RITIRO offers scholarships to help those in difficult situations care for their spiritual lives.
Call us at 636-274-0554



*As the earth brings forth its shoots,
and a garden makes its seeds spring up,
So will the Lord GOD make justice spring up,
and praise before all the nations.
– Isaiah 61:11*



Next Issue

In our next E-Newsletter, we would like to devote articles to Pope Francis, and we would like to include some of your reflections. How has Pope Francis encouraged you in your own relationship with God? We would ask you to keep it short, personal, and practical so that your thoughts can be spring board from which others might begin their own reflection. Send us an [email](#) with Pope Francis in the subject line.



Sunday gospel reflection questions are available on our webpage or can be sent to your e-mail each week. [Click here!](#)