

**Opening Banquet Keynote Address to the Association of Anglican Musicians,  
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I bring you greetings from Virginia Seminary in greater Washington, DC. Some of you might be content with your stereotypes of VTS, based on decades-old information. Others of you might like to have an update.

If so, listen to this. When I was first teaching at VTS, I sat down to lunch across from some students, and there was a young man at the table with a sweatshirt on that said, "VTS Rosary Society Football Team." Well, that sweatshirt was so full of apparent ironies that I laughed out loud.

He said, "It's no joke. We play football on campus, and we have a Rosary Society team."

"Really?" I gasped.

"Yes," he said. "Would you like to know the Rosary Society motto?"

"Of course I would?" I responded.

"Putting the Virgin back in Virginia."

There is also a large, thriving LGBT group on campus. There has been some criticism of this group, but it might not come from the people you suspect. The criticism has come mainly from heterosexual students on campus who didn't want to be excluded from the Gay group. So last year a Gay Allies Group was begun. When the gay group and the allies meet together, they represent a sizable portion of the entire student body.

A brief story on another subject: A friend of mine John was house-sitting for some people who were going on vacation to England. While they were gone, their cat died. John e-mailed them immediately in England with the bad news, and the family was so upset that they immediately came home. They said to John, "You don't understand. This cat is a member of our family, and it was a great shock to us that she'd died. You could've given us the news a little more gradually."

John said, "Well, how should I have done it?"

The father said, "Well, for example, the first day you might've said, 'Your cat is on the roof and I can't get her down.' Then the second day, you could've said, 'There's a thunderstorm coming, and I'm afraid for your cat's life.' Finally on the third day, you might've said, 'Your cat has died.'"

"Okay. I get it," replied John.

Despite this bad experience with John, the family asked him to housesit for them the following summer when they went to England. They were very surprised to get this e-mail from John: “Your grandmother is on the roof, and I can’t get her down.”

Well, enough of this silliness, or my time will all be gone. We need to talk about the Episcopal Church.

The Episcopal Church is on the roof, and we can’t get it down.

Now is that true or not? Is the Episcopal Church really dead? Well, there are some ways in which it is, and I want to suggest to you that it’s not such a bad thing. There are some aspects of the Episcopal Church that have died, and perhaps it was about time.

First of all, the Episcopal Church throughout most of its existence has been the richest per capita church in the U.S. While you and I might find some toothsome delight in that, I doubt that Jesus would find it too endearing. One of the reasons we’ve given up our old status is that our growth has been most significant among poorer, non-white populations. So that’s another thing that’s died. We are no longer exclusively a church of European Americans. I don’t know about you, but I find that kind of death a welcome thing.

This year, for the first time in the history of the U.S., new-born babies of European ancestry are in the minority. That’s right. Most babies born in 2012 are not white. If that’s true in the U.S., then I’m glad to know that the Episcopal Church is showing some of the same trends as the population at large.

When we hear talk of the Golden Age of the Anglican Church what do we mean? Is it the period immediately following World War II, when mainline churches were full? Or, as musicians, do we believe it to be that glorious age of Thomas Tallis, William Byrd, and Orlando Gibbons? What I want to suggest to you is the Golden Age of the Episcopal Church has not happened yet. In fact, it could be next. It could be in our lifetime.

Now that’s a pretty audacious statement, and so I want to support it a bit. I think that our culture is starving for something that we have in our legacy. Right in our cupboard is the very food that our friends are dying for.

By now most people are aware that young adults are not looking to the church to entertain them. That might’ve been what people were looking for in the 60s and 70s and 80s, but today’s young adults are looking for something else; they’re looking for something transcendent. They are looking for the numinous, the deeply spiritual, the mystical, for something that addresses their deepest urge to experience life at its most profound level.

Young adults can get entertainment. If they want rock music, they can do as my son did recently and go to the Verizon Center in D.C. to hear Radiohead. But they tell us that’s not what they want from church. What they want from church is deep spiritual sustenance. And that’s something we’ve got in abundance. While I don’t want us to seem proud as Episcopalians, we have to acknowledge that transcendence, deep spirit, the numinous, mystery—these are the gifts of our heritage.

But don't take my word for it. Many of you will recognize the name Brian McLaren. He is the pastor who is the leader of the Emerging Church Movement. Now before you write him off, listen to what Brian McLaren calls this period we live in: "The Episcopal Moment." Can you believe it? The leader of the Emerging Church movement calls this The Episcopal Moment. That is nothing short of extraordinary.

Brian McLaren was talking to my dear friend Dent Davidson. Dent is music chaplain to the House of Bishops, music coordinator in the Diocese of Chicago, and one of the most creative musicians in the church. McLaren wanted Dent to meet one of the musicians at Willow Creek, the independent mega-church just outside Chicago. Now that request might've scared the liver out of me, but Dent just hopped right on it.

Here's why McLaren wanted Dent to meet the Willow Creek musician. Because this musician had decided that the Willow Creek formula of five praise songs and a forty-five minute sermon just wasn't doing it for him anymore. What he's looking for is a liturgical, mystical dimension to feed his spirit and his creative life. Where did he turn? To a little book that many people would consider completely out of step with contemporary American life. It's called the Book of Common Prayer.

In Houston there is an emerging church whose pastor happens to be the son of a fraternity brother of mine. This church has no denominational ties, and their services tend to have a very loose liturgical structure. When they wished to deepen their worship to something beyond the informal structure they had, where did they look? To the Book of Common Prayer.

I want to be careful here, because if my pride gets in the way, I can wind up interpreting all the data in a way that just proves that Episcopalians have been right all along, and that's not the point. Other churches are doing some things that are very, very effective, and if we're smart, we'll also learn from them.

The point I'm making is simply this. People are starving for what you and I take for granted, for the food that is sitting right in our cupboard. But waiting for them to walk through our red doors is not going to work anymore. We've just got to figure out new ways to offer this treasure to them.

Here's one. Do you know about *el Sistema*? If you don't know about *el Sistema*, you owe it to yourself to find out. *El Sistema* is the most exciting thing happening in classical music education in the entire world, and it's happening, of all places, in the poor country of Venezuela. Over 300,000 children have received orchestral training through *el Sistema* since its founding in 1975. These days the Venezuelan government pumps \$64 million per year into the program, but it didn't start that way. One man named Jose Antonio Abreu began with little more than a dream. But a dream is always where things begin. To paraphrase the book of Proverbs, "Where there is a vision, the people flourish."

310,000 children have gone through *el Sistema*. There are 500 youth orchestras and ensembles in 280 locations, and this in a country with only twenty-nine million citizens. The vast majority of the children in these orchestras come from poor homes and from neighborhoods that would send them into gangs, drugs and crime, were it not for *el Sistema*.

One of its graduates is the most talked about young conductor in the world. Gustavo Dudamel assumed the helm of the L.A. Philharmonic at the ripe old age of twenty-eight, and the *New York Times* a couple months ago called him the Elvis of the Classical Music World. Recently he conducted a sold-out performance of the Mahler *Symphony of a Thousand* at Disney Hall. Scalpers were selling tickets for up to \$850. I love this story: Somebody was standing in line at Disney Hall trying to get a ticket, when another person approached him and said, "Is this the line for the Mahler?" "No," answered the first person. "This is the line for Dudamel." 800 singers joined the Los Angeles Philharmonic along with the Simon Bolivar Youth Orchestra from Venezuela.

And you should hear these South American kids play! I heard them at the Kennedy Center not long ago. I don't know about your youth orchestra, but the one I played in was nothing like this. These kids sound like a major professional orchestra. At the Kennedy Center the crowd went wild, cheering and applauding, and I was right with them. These young orchestra players are used to it. This is the response they get wherever they play including the Proms in London.

Here are kids, some of whom could be selling crack cocaine, but instead they are practicing Mozart, Bernstein, and Stravinsky.

In the Anglican Church we have our *Sistema*. It's called the Royal School of Church Music. Where it's flourishing, it is not only building musicians, but also developing faith in Christ and allegiance to his church. If your parish is like mine, it's filled with kids from affluent families, a great disadvantage. Why a disadvantage? Because affluent kids live in a world of over-choice. They simply have too many attractive opportunities, and church choir often gets short shrift.

But some of us have joined St. Bart's, New York City, in discovering that there are plenty of children in town who don't have abundant opportunities. When a new children's choir was announced to the parish, two children volunteered. "Well," exclaimed the rector, "It's not like there aren't kids in New York City, kids who need activities. We'll just have to find them." So they went to the underserved areas of town. As with *el Sistema* the parents of these kids are thrilled that someone takes an interest in their children and offers them something not only worthwhile but exciting to do with their off-school hours.

I began studying the St. Bart's program in 2002, because we were thinking of starting a similar program at St. John's, Lafayette Square. We eventually did start one, and Cindy DeDakis led it. When I visited New York, there were sixty children in the St. Bart's program, and they were singing up a storm: making CDs, singing on the Today Show, performing in Carnegie Hall. Now you have to realize that most of these families probably had only a vague idea what Carnegie Hall was. But here they were, listening to their kids sing with an orchestra.

When people tell me they don't have enough kids to have an RSCM program, I ask them if they can find three kids. That's enough. If the affluent kids from your parish won't come, figure out a way to offer the program to underserved populations. They'll jump at the chance.

Finally, this Golden Age won't happen without something else, leaders who are sensitive to the Holy Spirit. I want to affirm you as spiritual leaders. There's no use denying it. You are already doing the diligent work of spiritual formation, and it's more than just teaching notes. Along with those notes are magnificent words that have the capacity to transform lives, and transformation is happening every time you rehearse the great texts of anthems, Masses and motets. If you need some help discovering this part of your identity, find yourself a spiritual director.

Here's a word I found recently in a Roman Catholic musicians' publication, and I think it applies to you: *mystagogue*. A mystagogue is someone who leads others into religious mystery. Isn't that a great word? And you are mystagogues, every day ushering people into that sacred mystery that is our home.

Alright, mystagogues, go out there and change the world. You are surrounded by a culture that is starving for what you have in your cupboard. We can reach out to children and young adults through the RSCM. The Golden Age is right before us, and all we have to do is to be faithful people, and the Holy Spirit will usher it right in. Amen.