

# Along the track

## The Christchurch Symphony Orchestra

Following the devastating earthquake in February 2011, the Christchurch orchestra bureaucracy had to sort out their priorities having lost their performance centre, the Town Hall. They decided that was the least of their priorities and divided the musicians into small subsections and sent them to schools and other groups in that city to keep up their performance goals. When the full orchestra managed to get together and perform, it did so in an air force hanger which required the shifting of helicopters and planes. The conductor advised the orchestra to play *fortissimo* in case of rain on the tin roof. The outcome of these changes was that subscriptions and memberships increased fourfold.

Is this our time when we must go out of our comfort zones? Is this time when God is calling us to new frontiers, to live on the margins? For much of its history, the Christian church lived with the sense of being at home in the world, with considerable influence and power. That age is now over. We now live in a post-Christian age. That is both a challenge and a gift.

More than once God called the Israelites into exile. These were very painful and confusing times, but always they were ultimately characterised by a deep longing for reunion with God – not necessarily a return to the old ways because often that was why they were called into exile, to get past those times. Like those in exile of old, do we too at times feel a deep sense of loss and mourning for what we once had, the way things were, perhaps disappointment or even anger? Are we being called away from our roots, from those things that appear to have sustained us, to have given us comfort (or made us too comfortable?) and direction? Or, like some others who journeyed with Abram and Moses, are we perhaps impatient with things as they are, dissatisfied perhaps, wanting to move on? Or have we given it all away? What stage of the journey are we on?

We are meant to be in exile. We are wanderers, seekers, eternally searching. This isn't our final destination. Possibly the times we live in may heighten the tension that accompanies exile. Our faith is under scrutiny, our beliefs questioned even derided, our way of life challenged. Scandals of

sexual abuse and the abuse of power in its many forms have rocked the Church. Our message is not popular in the modern world – rather than being seen as challenging and life-giving, it is often regarded as outdated. Way back in 2001, the document *Ecclesia in Oceania* was written after the meeting of the Bishops from Australia and Oceania in Rome. The Bishops wrote that:

At times the Catholic Church is seen as presenting a message which is irrelevant, unattractive or unconvincing.....

*Ecclesia in Oceania* #14

So do we grumble like those Moses had led out of slavery in Egypt or do we remember that transformation happens in exile because quite often it is the only time God can get through to us, if we are open to that happening. Sometimes we get too comfortable with the status quo, too set in our own ways and, more importantly, not open to the ways of God.

This time of preparation for the Plenary Council may help us to reflect on what is important in our faith, what sustains us and what is needed but also, what challenges us and how we engage with the world around us.

Perhaps we need to stay with this pain for a while and let it transform us, to live with uncertainty, to be open to where God might be in our world today, to be open to where and how God may be calling us and our church.

The Christchurch orchestra is a great example of what can happen when we reach out to the community. The last word from Pope Francis:

*"We cannot keep ourselves shut up in parishes, in our communities when so many people are waiting for the Gospel, It's not enough simply to open the door in welcome, but we must go out through that door to seek and meet the people."*

Regards  
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