

Inspiration at Eastern Point

by Alice Poltorick

Retreatants at Eastern Point Retreat House find opportunities for quiet time, reflection, prayer and encountering the wonders of God's majesty in the physical world. Many also find the creativity to paint, write, photograph and compose while there. Fr. Robert VerEecke, SJ, pastor at St. Ignatius Church, wrote the words to the song, *You Will Know*, while at Eastern Point Retreat House. Paul Melley, then pastoral musician and coordinator of youth ministry at St. Ignatius, set the words to music.

Q. I first heard the song *You Will Know* while I was on retreat at Eastern Point. It touched my heart and moved me to tears. I heard that you wrote the lyrics to the song while you were there.

Fr. VerEecke: While on a parish retreat at Eastern Point Retreat House, I began thinking about our parish Lenten theme "On Holy Ground." Because of the reference in the story of Moses and the burning bush, "take off your shoes, this is holy ground," I began connecting this passage with the Lenten theme. I simply sat down and began writing. I was surprised at how the words flowed so easily. I had never done anything like this before.

Q. Paul Melley wrote the music. What was the inspiration for that collaboration?

Fr. VerEecke: I asked Paul, who was working as pastoral musician and coordinator of youth ministry at St. Ignatius at the time, if he would be interested in seeing a text I had written and possibly put it to music. About a month or so later, he sat down and



Paul Melley and Fr. Bob reunited at St. Ignatius Parish for an Easter evening of prayer, story, music and dance.

played the song for me. I remember being very moved since it seemed as if the music was what I had heard in my mind when I was writing the words. I think the Holy Spirit was the major collaborator on this work since it was pretty effortless and heartfelt. After the music was finished, I was able to choreograph the piece for the Boston Liturgical Dance Ensemble and it was performed at my 25th anniversary of ordination liturgy in June 2003.

Q. Paul, what was your inspiration for the music?

Melley: I had held onto the words for a while. My wife was pregnant with our first child, so I had a lot on my mind, and I believe that the piece (or rather I) wasn't ready to be "received."

I'm glad I waited. Fr. Bob wanted the piece ready by March 24, which turned out to be within the week after my daughter's birth. I remember having Erin asleep in the bassinet next to me as I sat down at the piano. I came up with the introduction within the very first minutes, and then came up with the melody for the opening line, "Take off your shoes. . ." After that, it all kind of tumbled out. I feel that God essentially handed me the whole piece, in its entirety as it now stands, within an hour of first sitting down. I felt I just had to "listen" for the music. It came together very quickly. I think it was aided by the sense of awe I felt at having the grace of a brand-new life entwined with my own.

Q. When did you first perform the song?

Melley: I first performed it for Fr. Bob who told me that this was the melody he heard in his head when he was writing the lyrics. I then played it for the Boston Liturgical Dance Ensemble. Then we used it for Holy Week Evening Prayer and again at my daughter's Baptism. When I was working on compiling the songs for my CD, *Humbled*, *You Will Know* was at the top of the list.

Q. Are you collaborating on new material?

VerEecke: Paul and I have collaborated on only one other piece. I wrote the lyrics for *Who Is My Neighbor*

which Paul composed for the Nativity Spirit Dinner in Boston last year.

Melley: I certainly hope so! Fr. Bob is a person of great faith and has the ability to articulate that faith in a meaningful way. He has been a longtime dear friend and mentor. I think he has a lot more to say. It is exciting to think of what we could continue to do.

Fr. Robert VerEecke, SJ, is the pastor at St. Ignatius Church in Chestnut Hill, Massachusetts and artist-in-residence at Boston College. Paul Melley is director of liturgical music and assistant chaplain at the College of the Holy Cross.



*Take off your shoes;
this is holy ground you
walk on. Open your eyes;
this is holy fire you see.
Show me your face,
a reflection of my glory,
and you will know
who I am ...*

You Will Know on Paul Melley's *Humbled* CD available at www.giamusic.com



To learn more about Eastern Point Retreat House in Gloucester, Massachusetts, visit www.easternpoint.org. For more about retreat experiences, view the "What can happen on an Ignatian Retreat" videos on the Jesuits of New England channel on www.youtube.com