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## *The Artist In All Of Us Needs Encouragement*

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*  
by the Very Reverend Sam G. Candler**

I play piano on occasion, and I love it. People who hear me play, or watch me play, realize soon enough that I love it. What people may not understand, however, is the anxiety I carry with me whenever I play piano in public.

At one time, I intended to play jazz piano in life, or to compose, or to do both. That anxiety, still present today, is probably the reason I decided, long ago, that I would not make the piano my vocation. Another reason I withdrew from a musical vocation, however, is that I considered myself simply not good enough. I love to play piano, but I have much more fun playing as an amateur, with the piano as an avocation -- not a vocation.

Even today, when my dear wife hears me play piano at home and says to me, "You are very good!" I prefer to suspect that she says so only because she is supposed to; she is an encourager from beginning to end! Because I know all the mistakes I am playing, and I know how far short my performance falls "" and I am not even a professional critic!

On the other hand, I tell my wife, I actually need those words of encouragement. Even if I have heard them before, even if I know the words might become routine from people who love me, still something inside me enjoys the attention and even applause.

Thus, I was encouraged to read a column from Terry Teachout ("The Unsure Artist," in *The Wall Street Journal*, 6 March 2010), who speaks about the longing for positive reinforcement, encouragement, that most artists seem to carry with them. Again, fortunately, I do not count myself a professional artist; but I do know there is something artistic about me, in both my music and my priesthood.

Teachout speaks about the great jazz clarinetist, Benny Goodman, and his daring decision to play jazz at Carnegie Hall in 1938. Why take that daring leap? Teachout suspects that "Goodman, for all his popularity, was deeply unsure of his musical worth and longed for the cultural legitimacy that a successful appearance at Carnegie Hall would confer." Teachout continues that "few artists, no matter how celebrated they may be, are strangers to fear and uncertainty." He mentions John Keats (who died claiming that he had left no immortal work behind him) and Benjamin Britten (who, supposedly, threw up every time he played the piano in public).

Finally, we hear what Orson Welles told Peter Bogdanovich, "A bad word from a colleague can darken a whole day; we need encouragement a lot more than we admit, even to ourselves."

Maybe not all of us would be deemed "professional," but surely each of us is an artist, in some way. Each of us shows up, at some place in life, to add our work and creativity to the situation at hand. Whether we actually call ourselves "artists," or not, all of us carry anxiety and uncertainty with us through life. The words of Orson Welles are words for us no matter what our vocation is. We need encouragement!

I heard someone guess that it takes, perhaps, ten words of positive encouragement to overwhelm one word of negative anxiety. I believe that. Be one of the ten words of encouragement for someone today. "Encourage one another and build up each other" (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

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