



Word on Worship

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Newsletter of the Worship Office, Archdiocese of Newark, NJ

Editor's Note:

In this issue of *Word on Worship*, we asked four different writers to reflect upon the music ministry in a parish setting. We asked three writers - a music minister, pastor and a person in the pews - to reflect on what they saw as important issues surrounding the ministry of music. We asked a fourth writer to summarize and reflect on the three previous articles. We hope this issue of *Word on Worship* will help us grow in our understanding of the ministry of music and help us improve the effectiveness of this ministry in our parishes.

Music in Catholic Worship, the 1972 landmark document that provides a pastoral vision of music and its role in the worshipping community, makes the bold statement that "Good celebrations foster and nourish faith. Poor celebrations may weaken and destroy it." (MCW 6) This assertion is based on the insight that symbols, including music, both *express* and *shape* our faith. In the nearly 25 years since that publication, this insight has proven to be all too true. The quality and effectiveness of Sunday worship often is directly related to the symbols, how they are chosen, and how and by whom they are brought before and shared with the assembly.

This is particularly true in the area of music. Music in Mass and other liturgical celebrations is not an extra

embellishment. Music is normative. Music, chosen and performed well, speaks powerfully to both the mind and the heart. The presiding celebrant and the music minister have an important and central role and responsibility in making the signs which express our faith and mediate our encounter with Christ.

What then should be a local parish's expectations of its music minister? I believe that it is the same expectation that we have of all liturgical ministers — to exercise his or her ministry in such a competent and transparent way that the assembly can more easily experience Christ present in word, sacrament and one another.

WHAT MAKES A MUSIC MINISTER'S MINISTRY COMPETENT?

Every parish has a right to expect that its music minister has the musical credentials and/or experience necessary to effectively produce a parish musical program that supports the liturgical life of the community,

encompassing the instrumentalists, leaders of song, the choir and the assembly. This includes:

- a familiarity with and working knowledge of the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM), *Music in Catholic Worship*, *Liturgical Music Today*;
- a knowledge of and insight into the role of music in the various rituals of the Catholic Church, including the Eucharist, marriage, baptism, penance, funerals, and the RCIA;
- an appreciation of the centrality of the liturgical year in the spiritual life of the community and a knowledge of the purpose for various liturgical seasons;
- an understanding of and commitment to the Catholic Church's vision of the relationship between choir, musicians, and the assembly;
- a professionalism in the execution of his

WHAT DO WE EXPECT OF A MUSIC MINISTER

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or her responsibilities; being on time for services with attire and appearance that communicate a respect for what is being celebrated;

- a spirit of cooperation with other musicians and ministries. This may require meetings and rehearsals at times beyond the services themselves.
- an ability and willingness to produce a long-range plan for parish music development which respects musical and/or ethnic traditions, yet also includes new hymns and new service music.
- a commitment to developing his or her talents through adequate preparation and rehearsal time, and through continuing musical and liturgical education.

WHAT MAKES A MUSIC MINISTRY TRANSPARENT?

There is a difference between a musician and a music minister. This difference is often hard to define in words, but is easily understood when we experience a true music minister. Liturgy is a celebration of the Paschal Mystery — what God is doing for us in Christ. The good music minister exercises his or

her musical talents in such a way that the assembly is led to what God is doing, rather than to what we are doing. The way we exercise a ministry should allow the assembly to see beyond and through the individual minister and the symbols to the God who is acting in their lives. All liturgical ministers need a quality of transparency in the effective exercise of their ministry. For the music minister this includes:

- an awareness that music is not the goal of the assembly — God is. Good, vibrant music can be a powerful tool to lead people to God.
- an understanding that, within liturgy, music is not a pure art, but an applied art. There are other values that guide the choice of music besides the musical judgment. Music must also be chosen to achieve the liturgical and pastoral goals of the assembly.
- an appreciation that he or she is a member of the worshipping community yet with a special role. The music minister does not perform for the assembly. The music minister worships God with the assembly, using his or her talents to enable the assembly to

express its faith in song.

- an openness to many musical styles that enable the diversity of God's people to be expressed in worship.
- an enthusiasm for what music can do to engage people and improve the quality of worship.

As a priest and a pastor, I thank God for all music ministers who have used their talents, and at times have sacrificed, so that the community could express its faith in song. Their wonderful talents add much to a parish's worship. However, not all good musicians are good music ministers.

The most talented musician I ever met was also the worst music minister. His ability on the organ was nearly breathtaking; but he saw each Mass as an opportunity to perform rather than serve. His performances said "look at what I can do" instead of saying "look at how we can offer thanks for what God is doing." Ultimately, it is the ability of a man or woman to let his or her faith shine through the music that makes a musician into an effective minister of music.+

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A MUSIC MINISTER'S EXPECTATIONS OF A PASTOR

With a perspective of twenty-four years in liturgical music, both in full and part-time positions, I welcome this invitation to describe the kind of pastor with whom I would like to work. It is my hope that my observations could result in a fresh, open dialogue between pastors and musicians as to the vital importance that each has in the music ministry of any parish.

Three key words provide a basis for discussion regarding the pastor and the total music ministry of a parish: competence, concern, and vision. Each word carries with it a great responsibility. When all are present, the music ministry of a parish will truly fulfill its role and mission.

The pastor of any parish, large or small, is entrusted with the spiritual care of his people, and so has many responsibilities. He has to have a vision of what the music ministry in the parish should be. Within the music ministry, the issue of competence is crucial since almost every facet of parish life, from birth to death, should be celebrated with music.

The various rites of the Church, from Christian Initiation through Christian Burial, encourage our communal participation in song. Music ministers should carefully study the many church documents dealing with liturgy, music, art, and architecture. For example, a thorough knowledge of *Music in Catholic Worship* (Revised Edition, 1983), as well as the introductions to the Sacramentary and the Lectionary, are basic to the understanding of the importance of music in worship. The pastor I would like to work with has not only read these important documents once but many times. Discussion of these

documents by the parish staff and music ministry are key to the ongoing improvement in the celebration of the various liturgical rites within the parish.

Along with competence and an understanding of liturgical practices, a pastor should exhibit a degree of tasteful creativity. The ability to work with the music ministry and to suggest creative ways of integrating different forms of music into the sacramental and eucharistic celebrations would be most helpful to parish musicians. Positive suggestions in the planning of music

continued on page 16

IN REMEMBRANCE

MOST REVEREND JOSEPH ABEL FRANCIS, S.V.D., D.D.

Bishop Francis, retired Auxiliary Bishop of Newark, died on September 1, 1997. He was born in Lafayette, Louisiana in 1923, ordained a priest of the Society of the Divine Word in 1950 and Auxiliary Bishop of Newark in 1975. He had been the founder of Verbum Dei High School in the Watts section of Los Angeles and principal author of the Pastoral Letter of the U.S. Bishops entitled, *Brothers and Sisters To Us*. In the homily at his funeral Mass in the Cathedral Basilica of the Sacred Heart, Newark, the Most Reverend Theodore E. McCarrick said, "He literally called the whole church in our land to the struggle against the sin of racism, against discrimination and the denial of human dignity."

O God,
from the ranks of your priests
you chose your servant Joseph
to fulfill the office of bishop.

Grant that he may share
in the eternal fellowship of those priests
who, faithful to the teachings of the apostles,
dwell in your heavenly kingdom. (*Order of Christian Funerals, 398.16*)

A VIEW FROM THE PEW

The celebration of the liturgy is of the highest priority in a parish community, and within that celebration music has a special place of importance. We believe that sacred song assists the assembled believers in expressing and sharing the gift of the faith that is within them, and that sacred song nourishes and strengthens that faith. We believe that the sacred music imparts a sense of unity to the congregation, and sets the appropriate tone for a particular celebration. We believe that music assists us in reaching that *“full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations”* called for in the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* (14).

A parish music program should provide music that enhances the spirit and encourages the full participation of the assembled worshipers. The music should be scripture-based, life-giving, evocative, and should be broad in style ranging from traditional to contemporary. A parish music program should also seek to expand the number of people involved in the music ministry and

develop their skills.

This sounds like a lot for one music minister to accomplish. But if we start with the first goal of enhancing the spirit and encouraging the full participation of the assembly the other goals should fall into place. Although the music minister will assume most of the responsibility for accomplishing these musical goals, the pastor and other priests on the staff must actively support the music ministry.

What do we look for in a music minister? Just someone who can play the organ and perhaps, direct a choir? No, we must look for someone who is a person of prayer as well as sensitive to living the liturgical life of the Roman Catholic community.

We lead by example. If the music minister is a person of prayer, that will not only affect other members of the music ministry, but will also draw the parishioners in the pews to prayer. They will come to see that the music is not chosen just because it sounds *nice* but because it is prayer that complements and supports the readings of

the day or the nature of the celebration, (for example, baptism.)

In addition to being a person of prayer, the music minister needs to be sensitive when introducing new music. She/he needs to allow time for parishioners to learn any new music and become comfortable with it. We cannot always expect the *average* parishioner to hear a new song ten minutes before the celebration and be able to sing it. Introducing a song this way may cause frustration for parishioners who could feel left out because they cannot follow the music, as well as for the music minister who has been practicing for weeks with the cantor and/or choir, and for the presider who senses the frustration of the assembly and cannot do anything about it. Ways can be found to introduce new pieces of music to the people gradually, perhaps by first playing the tune/melody as a prelude for a few weeks before the piece is scheduled to be taught to the assembly.

We should not overlook the professional background of the music

ministers. They should be trained in both liturgy and music. They must be familiar with both traditional and contemporary Roman Catholic liturgical music. They will realize that while music must fit the celebration, it can vary in style. There is a broad range of music from which to choose, from the traditional to the contemporary, the music ministers must be able to judge when and what is appropriate for the community and the celebration. They have to be sensitive to the musical, liturgical, and

pastoral judgments that have to be made. At the same time, music ministers must be open to introducing the community to new styles, but in a way that will excite everyone to try something new.

It is important that music ministers remember the *younger* people, too. A good music program must include music for them. Music that is spirited, vibrant, and engaging will encourage them to participate. At the same time, like all good liturgical music, this music must be

related to the readings or connected to the specific celebration or season. All too often we forget that if we are going to keep people in the pews and invite their participation in the liturgy, we must provide a welcoming musical environment for everyone, young as well as old.

The music minister also needs to be present to the worshipping community. He or she has to be seen by the parish as the director of music and the coordinator of all parish music groups. Through presence and education, the music minister must shape the experience of the Christian believers into a musical language that is subtle, sensitive, faithful, imaginative and interesting.

I am sure all this sounds like a lot for one minister to be responsible for, but this should not be a *stand alone* ministry. The music minister should work collaboratively with the staff of the parish, and with the liturgy committee, in a joint effort to encourage the parish assembly to enter the liturgy and become "full and active participants." +

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THE "REPRISE"

A REFLECTION ON THE THREE PERSPECTIVES

The document, *Music in Catholic Worship (MCW)* begins, "We are Christians because through the Christian community we have met Jesus Christ, heard his word in invitation, and responded to him in faith. We gather at Mass that we may hear and express our faith again in this assembly and by expressing it, renew and deepen it."

Those words leave no question about what we, as a community of faith, do as we gather each Sunday. Music helps us to express our faith, and gives it a depth of meaning beyond what the spoken word can do. Our three writers agree that having a quality music program is an essential component of parish life. Their different approaches in making that a reality offer some points for reflection.

I found it interesting that it was the parishioner who spoke of music as enhancing, expressing, and strengthening faith, while both the pastor and the music minister were concerned over contracts and agreements. Certainly this is understandable since most music ministers are paid parish employees,

and pastors are the employers. However, this concern over contracts illustrates that a great deal of energy is spent on employment issues and personalities, rather than on whether or not the parish music program is enlivening the liturgy and touching hearts with the healing and loving presence of the Lord.

"The function of music is ministerial; it must serve and never dominate. Music should assist the assembled believers to express and share the gift of faith that is within them and to nourish and strengthen their interior commitment of faith...

(Music) imparts a sense of unity to the congregation and sets the tone for a particular celebration." (MCW 23) For music to fulfill this ministerial function, music ministers, pastors, and people, cannot make their personal taste the criteria of deciding appropriate music. Nor can those involved with music selectively use the documents of the Church to support their own preference and to attack the ideas of others. The importance of liturgical planning is also emphasized by our writers. Quality time must be given to prepare for the celebration of the

liturgy. This is acknowledged by everyone, but often such time is not given. If liturgy committees, pastors, and musicians were to make time to meet together and to discuss how the selection of music, as well as other dimensions of the liturgy (i.e. art, environment, liturgical season), should fit together, much senseless bickering could be eliminated. If issues, suggestions, and differences of opinion are openly spoken about before the celebration, complaining and criticism after the liturgy would be greatly reduced.

We all have a tendency to let things build within us and to express disapproval more often than praise. Because of that, when pastors and people make critical comments about the choice of songs, music ministers can hear them as personal attacks. The music minister should be the primary person to make musical selections, however input, at least on a seasonal basis from the liturgy committee and the priests would benefit the minister and improve the musical program of the parish. The wisdom of the many is greater than that of the one.



Pastors, liturgy committees, and music ministers should frequently reflect upon the threefold judgment involved in making musical selections. The musical, the liturgical, and the pastoral criteria found in *Music in Catholic Worship* (23-41) should be periodically reread and discussed. A pastor might even consider sharing this part of the document with the assembly by way of the Sunday bulletin.

The selection of musical pieces is a big issue. The assembly wants musical pieces that are easy to sing, enjoyable, connected to the readings, and able to touch the heart. The music chosen should also include all those who make up the assembly. Music should make people feel at home in the liturgy. New music should be introduced slowly so people can become familiar with it, and make it their own.

These goals of the assembly can be different than the goals of the professional musician. Musicians may be tempted to *show off* their talent by selecting new and overly complicated musical compositions. But such music is often difficult for the people and leads to their passivity in the liturgy. Professional musicians also have a tendency to constantly change the

musical selections. While they hear a particular selection many times over a weekend, they forget the assembly sings it only once. The people need time to make the music their prayer.

Support for the music ministry was another concern raised by the writers. Support of course needs to be defined. It means more than just financial support, it means genuine caring as well. Yet, money is important. A pastor must remember that a musician must receive a living wage. For their part, musicians must remember that parishes have limited resources and many pastoral needs. Yet our Sunday worship must be a priority. Certainly funds must be available to pay a just salary, to purchase a good music aid, to provide for cantors, and to hire additional instrumentalists for special occasions. Sometimes our parishes have people who would be willing to offer their musical abilities if they were invited and made to feel like they were contributing to the beauty and prayerfulness of the liturgy.

Support also means seeing music as essential for worship. No Sunday Mass should not be celebrated without song. Because of the power music has for deepening

faith, we should be looking for opportunities to include rather than exclude music.

Support also means affirming music ministers. This affirmation comes by words of encouragement and compliment. Everyone needs to be told they are doing a good job. Encouragement brings forth the best in people. That does not mean we can never correct or suggest improvements, but because we have been encouraging in the past, such criticism is not taken as a personal attack. Affirmation also comes by encouraging music ministers to take part in appropriate workshops and other educational opportunities, and financially supporting them when they do so.

I began with the opening words of *Music in Catholic Worship*, I conclude with its final words. "When all strive with one accord to make the Mass a prayer, a sharing and celebration of faith, the result is unity. Styles of music, choices of instruments, forms of celebration — all converge in a single purpose: that men and women of faith may proclaim and share faith in prayer and Christ may grow among us all." (MCW 84) +

Rev. Michael A. Saporito
Editor—Word on Worship



A Music Minister's Expectations...
continued from page 11

programs would be more than welcome.

Music ministers need to know that their ministry is well supported by the pastor, the parish staff, and the worshipping community. The concern of the pastor for providing this support on a regular basis seems lacking in many parishes and is often disheartening to musicians who give above and beyond their *contracted* time. Most music ministers would be greatly surprised if a pastor took the initiative to congratulate the choir, cantor, or instrumentalists on their

musical leadership for a special celebration or Sunday Mass. A note in the church bulletin or an article on the importance of music within the liturgical celebrations of the parish would provide an ideal opportunity for recognition. Our human nature seeks this type of recognition and the concern of the pastor can help provide positive encouragement for the music program in any parish and provide further education of the parish community.

Although pastoral responsibilities are great, the concern of the pastor for the financial support of the music ministry is also crucial. The ability

of the parish to provide responsibly for quality instruments, competent musicians to play them, and cantors or other vocalists within the choir program, enables the music ministry to provide beauty and solemnity in the celebrations throughout the liturgical year.

Another concern of the pastor must be the provision of a salary that is truly commensurate with the ability, education, and time required of the music minister. Recognition of the need for time away from the parish for family or personal matters, professional in-service, and other *life* problems is

sometimes overlooked.

As the Church approaches the year 2000, the vision of a strong, aesthetically literate and spiritually renewed community of faith is possible. My prayer is that the Church work diligently to provide pastors of competence, concern, and vision who will provide the leadership necessary to make this a reality. +

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