THIS LENT, UNPACK

Parishes tend to add activities for Lent because people are looking for extra ways to keep this season: extra Masses, extra devotions (Stations of the Cross), extra activities of service, extra formational programs. This means that priests become extra busy, trying to meet the added demands and expectations of their communities. But if Lent is intended to be a time for reflection, renewal, and re-dedication, in some respects shouldn’t we be instead slowing down, clearing schedules so that we and our parishioners have time for prayer, meditation, and encounter with the living God? Some parishes try to do that by clearing calendars of meetings—not always successfully, of course. But in general, Lent seems to get busier rather than calmer. As I am entering Lent for the first time at my new parish, I am keenly aware of just how much pressure there is to make something significant out of Lenten observances.

Of course, this Lent’s schedule is already set and announced, and people expect to find the usual Lenten “extras” in the schedule. They (at least, some) would be disappointed if things were otherwise. Some priests also schedule extra “penitential” tasks for themselves, in addition to the added work that the parish schedule places on them. “This will be the year that I finally read that book about Scripture.” “This year I’ll schedule a whole hour for meditation and prayer each day and stick to it beyond the First Sunday of Lent!” Such good intentions, like New Year’s resolutions, besides paving the way to hell, can quickly bring us to frustration, a sense of defeat, and a loss of self-worth.

Perhaps this Lent we can go easy on ourselves and accomplish a deepening of the spiritual life at the same time. Since schedules are tight, what we need to work on is a better use of the time available. What that means is really trying to be more conscious of what’s going on and being more conscientious about what we’re doing. In addition to the focus expected by the daily praying of the Hours, several traditional practices of the spiritual life tried to get at that improved awareness: morning meditation, midday “particular examen,” and nighttime reflection on how the day went. The “practice of the presence of God” is another very traditional way to be aware of the holiness of all that we do: Before each action or each section of the day, remember that you are in the holy presence of God.

So rather than adding activities this Lent (beyond what we’re already committed to), maybe we can combine some of the simpler traditional practices with some techniques to help us focus on what we’re doing. Before praying one of the Hours, for example, take some slow,
quieting breaths, and remember that you are praying in God’s presence. When reviewing the readings for a coming Mass, read them slowly, in a kind of lectio divina, taking time to stop and pray when the readings take you in that direction. At the end of the day, take a minute or two to thank God for all that happened that day—for the good things as well as for the bad, for the opportunities to be of service and the opportunities to learn how you need to improve your ministry.

And practice taking yourself lightly. Remember: It’s not about us, it’s about people being able to encounter God through our ministries. We need to be as “light”—as open to and reflective of the divine Presence—as we can be. Learn to laugh at your mistakes and then try to do better. Let’s go easy on ourselves this Lent, and let God guide us to Easter renewal.

Msgr. Rick Hilgartner

WHY COME TO GRAND RAPIDS IN 2015?

Clergy these days are very busy people, with little time for vacation, retreat, or updating. So why should we spend precious days at the NPM Convention in Grand Rapids? Well, first, because Liturgy is a cooperative enterprise. “For the celebration of the Eucharist,” as the General Instruction of the Roman Missal reminds us, “is the action of the whole Church, and in it each one should carry out solely but totally that which pertains to him, in virtue of the place of each within the People of God” (GIRM, 5). “There should be harmony and diligence among all those involved in the effective preparation of each liturgical celebration” (GIRM, 111), and this is especially true of the priest and the music ministers, especially the director of music ministries or music director, who “provides a major service by working with the bishop or pastor to oversee the planning, coordination, and ministries of the parish or diocesan liturgical music program: (Sing to the Lord, 45). In Grand Rapids, parish clergy may particularly want to participate with their music directors and other music ministers in Breakout A, “In Conversation With.” The focus of these sessions is on the needs, expectations, and gifts of various constituencies—Hispanic/Latino/Latina communities, African and African American communities, Asian Pacific communities, youth, and young adults.

NPM Conventions are “clergy-friendly,” inviting priests to participate with other pastoral musicians in the presentations and events of a convention, so they can reflect together, pray together, and sing together. Like other interest sections within the Association,
clergy members are asked to gather on Monday afternoon to reflect on what the Association can offer them, what they can bring to the work that we share, and how the section should proceed with the formation of its members in the future. In addition, because prayer is a key part of the convention, clergy are asked to participate in their proper role in the celebrations of the Eucharist, sacramental reconciliation for convention participants, and other ways reserved to the ordained. Besides offering presentations by members of the clergy, the conventions regularly offer special workshops for members of the clergy, and the Grand Rapids Convention is no exception.

For Clergy. Workshops designed for clergy participants begin on Wednesday afternoon, with Monsignor Richard Hilgartner (D-02) or with Father Karl Pung (D-04). They continue on Thursday afternoon in a meeting with Father Michael Flynn of the BCDW (E-04), and they conclude on Friday morning with a session on clergy and musician communication (F-04).

Clergy participants, of course, and not limited to those sessions designed for them. Many other sessions during the convention week address issues in which they may be interested. Like other participants, they may be particularly interested in the series of workshops on the new Rite of Marriage (B-02, C-02, D-02, E-02, F-02). Here are just a few other topics of interest:

- **Chant.** Bishops, priests, deacons, and seminarians at this year’s convention may want to participate in one of the sessions focused on chant and its use especially in the Ordinary Form of the Liturgy. Those sessions begin on Monday morning, with a pre-convention Chant Clinic with Father Columba Kelly, osb (MC-04). There are also workshops on Tuesday (B-03, with Lowell Davis, not Anthony Ruff), Wednesday (C-03 and D-03), Thursday (E-03), and Friday (F-03).

- **Scripture.** Clergy participants may also want to participate in the pre-convention Liturgy Master Class (MC-06) with Diane Zerfas, op, and get a jump on their homily preparation for Year C by studying the Gospel of Luke.

- **Parish.** Liturgy, of course, is at the heart of parish life, so it affects everything else that goes on in the parish, and parish life beyond the community’s worship affects what happens in the Liturgy. In Grand Rapids, there will be workshops examining obstacles to full, conscious, and active participation (B-15); leading worship at multiple sites and dealing with mergings and parish closings (E-08); and Liturgy and the “eighty percent” (F-08).

**INVITE A SEMINARIAN**

From our beginning, NPM has offered as its basic membership a two-part package: priest and musician. We have believed that what the
Second Vatican Council said about the liturgy applies in a particular way to the music of the liturgy: “It would be futile to entertain any hopes of realizing [full, conscious, and active participation by all] unless the pastors themselves, in the first place, become thoroughly imbued with the spirit and power of the liturgy, and undertake to give instruction about it” (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 14). And we echo what the Catholic bishops in the United States have affirmed: “No other single factor affects the Liturgy as much as the attitude, style, and bearing of the priest celebrant” (Sing to the Lord, 18).

From our beginning, we have also been interested in the kind of preparation for sung liturgy offered in seminaries. We have affirmed the Congregation for Catholic Education’s 1979 Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries, which noted: “Given the importance of sacred music in liturgical celebrations, the students should be trained in music by experts, including a practical training, in those things necessary for them in their future roles as presidents and moderators of liturgical celebrations” (56). We were delighted when a survey from 1985 showed that eighty percent of U.S. major seminaries (theologates) offered courses to train singing presiders, though only about fifty percent of the respondents offered a course or courses in voice training for seminarians. So we feel it is more important than ever to offer seminarians an opportunity to participate with pastoral musicians in our Association and in our annual convention.

For this reason, NPM has created a new category of membership: Seminarians and Religious in Formation. Annual membership dues are just $25.00, and participation at the annual NPM convention is being generously subsidized by an anonymous donor, so that the rate is reduced to $100.00 for early bird registration for the full convention.

So if you know a seminarian who should be involved in NPM, why not give him the gift of a one-year membership and/or sponsor his participation in the 2015 Annual Convention?

CONVENTION DISCOUNTS

In addition to the early registration discounts, NPM offers special discounts so that more staff and parishioners might attend the convention. Be sure to consider them as you make your plans for Grand Rapids.

**Early Bird and Advanced Registration.** If you register for the convention by March 6, you can save $100 off the regular member’s convention registration fee. If you register between March 7 and June 5, you can save $50 off the regular rate. And don’t forget: If you have a current NPM parish membership, anyone in the parish can register at the members’ rate. If you have a current individual membership, the members’ rate is available only to you.

**Clergy/Musician Duo Discount.** One clergy member and one musician from a parish with a current parish membership, who register for the convention together and in advance, can receive even greater discounts. Registration by March 6 costs only $270 each (a savings of $25 each off the early bird fee); between March 7 and June 5, registration is $320 each (a savings of $25 each off the advance fee). Please note: This discount is not available online or onsite.
Youth Discount. NPM member youth (twenty-one and younger) attending the full convention receive a discounted rate (just $200 by March 6; $235 between March 7 and June 5; $285 regular rate). Remember that a parent or chaperone must accompany youth attendees under eighteen; the chaperone must be at least twenty-one years old and registered either for the full convention or as a companion. Signed copies of the Code of Conduct for Youth Participating in NPM Conventions, Code of Conduct for Chaperones and Parents Acting as Chaperones, and the Parental or Guardian Permission Form and Release must be on file with NPM before anyone under the age of eighteen will be admitted to the convention. For more information, visit www.npm.org/Events/Codeofconduct.htm.

Seminarian/Religious in Formation. While the normal convention registration fee for seminarians and religious who are in formation programs is the same as that for youth, through the generosity of an anonymous donor we are able to offer a discounted fee of just $100 for the full convention, if you register by March 6. After that date, the fee increases to $135 between March 7 and June 5, and $185 after June 5.

Group Discounts. NPM chapters and parishes with a current NPM parish membership who register in groups receive a discount. Chapter directors have the information about chapter discounts; the rates for parish group discounts are in the January issue of Pastoral Music.

Program Scholarships

NPM program scholarships are made possible through the generosity of NPM members and our associates who have made financial contributions to assist pastoral musicians with limited financial resources to take advantage of opportunities for continuing formation at NPM conventions and institutes. Applicants for scholarships must be NPM members and should be from economically disadvantaged parishes. The financial need of the applicant should be reflected in the application. NPM encourages members of all ethnic and racial groups to apply for scholarships.

Scholarship applications are due by the advance registration deadline for the particular program and are considered on a case-by-case basis. Scholarships are awarded depending on the financial need of the applicant and the amount of funds available in the NPM Program Scholarship Fund and in other program scholarships provided this year. Scholarships for conventions include full convention registration only. Scholarships for NPM institutes include the commuter registration fee only. All remaining costs must be borne by the applicant and/or his or her parish.

Recipients of the NPM Program Scholarships are to submit a follow-up report, reflecting on their convention or institute experience, describing what they have learned, what they are taking back to their parish, and how they can implement what they have learned.

For further information, check the NPM website: Program Scholarships.