I have just finished reviewing responses from the survey that we sent to all of our members asking for feedback on NPM education and formation programs. The NPM Task Force on Education met recently to review the feedback, and I look forward to sharing the wisdom of the committee that will give our Board of Directors, Education Committee, and me guidance about what we need to offer and how we need to offer it in the future. As I read through the responses, I was aware that some clergy respondents noted that they would like to see the Association address the needs of clergy members more directly. In planning NPM programs, I do receive guidance from the steering committee for the NPM Section for Clergy, and this input has proved invaluable. However, we do not always hear from the majority of our 1,000 clergy members about what you need or look for from us. In other words: “How can we better serve you?”

Certainly, all of us are busy. We have to make choices about how and where to invest our time, energy, and financial resources. I am delighted that each year about 250 clergy members choose to attend and participate in the annual convention. Thank you for your presence at our annual gatherings and for that kind of support. We have had some clergy members participate in the institutes that have been part of our history and which are currently under review. Thank you for your presence at those and for that kind of support. Many of you support our musician and liturgist members by paying for all or part of their attendance at NPM conventions and other educational events. Thank you for your interest and for that kind of support.

All of these ways to support each other and all of our members are valuable, but I wonder if there are some additional ways that we can help to address you and your needs. Some respondents to the general education survey, for instance, asked whether a webinar series geared to clergy issues would be helpful. What say ye? And if we were to design this kind of webinar series, what topics would you like to see addressed?

This publication, Clergy Update, was designed to offer education in matters liturgical, theological, pastoral, and musical, in bite-sized pieces that could be “read on the run.” How are we doing? What kinds of articles would you like to see offered, and what kind of information would be helpful to you?

Pastoral Music is a very fine publication that offers in-depth discussion about various topics in the areas of pastoral liturgy and music. We constantly seek to improve all of our materials so that we can address the issues that are current or need to be addressed. The topic for our September 2013 issue was “Priest: Minister to a Priestly People.” Did
you find that issue valuable? Are there other articles or materials that you would like us to consider for publication in Pastoral Music?

I am always looking for topics that will pique your interest in attending our conventions, especially topics in the clergy track. What has been addressed at our conventions that you would like to see repeated? What has not been addressed that would attract your attention and lead you to register for a convention? What other feedback would you like to offer regarding our conventions? We have been grateful for the increasing willingness of priest members to serve as confessors during the convention lunch periods. Many of our lay and clergy members appreciate this service, and I thank you for making my annual invitation a joyful request.

What else would you like NPM to offer to serve you and your pastoral, spiritual, liturgical, and ministerial needs? We are an association of “musicians, clergy, liturgists, and other leaders of prayer.” The clergy-musician relationship has been a priority for us from the beginning of NPM.

Please feel free to send me an e-mail with your thoughts so that we may be of better service to you and, through you, to the Church as a whole.

Paul Colloton, osfs
npmpaul@npm.org

For Your Information

The pages of Pastoral Music have regularly contained articles addressed to clergy and, thus, particularly to our clergy members. All the issues addressed to clergy, the special topics that examine liturgy in general for all ministers, and the separate articles through volume thirty-two (2007–2008) may be found online at Pastoral Music. Other, more recent volumes, are not yet online, but you may still have them in your library.

Here are some of the highlights from our “flagship” publication:


Volume 5:1 (October-November 1980): Celebrating Liturgy with Children. Liturgy with children appears as a topic about as frequently as weddings and funerals. See volumes 7:2 (December-January 1983); 12:2 (December-January 1988); 18:5 (June-July 1994).

Volume 7:1 (October-November 1982): Clergy and Musicians Ministering Together. Articles on communication, control, support, and other issues. See also
volumes 18:4 (April-May 1994); 30:6 (August-September 2006)


Volume 34:4 (May 2010): *Why We SING What We Sing and DO What We Do at Mass.* A basic overview or review.


Volume 37:5 (September 2013): *Priest: Minister to a Priestly People.*

And here are some individual topics that keep recurring down the years:


A Letter from a Church under Persecution

On October 29, Chaldean Catholic Archbishop Shamoun Nona of the Archdiocese of Mosul, Iraq, made available a letter from the Church in Iraq to “Christians in the West.” The English text was made available through Aid to the Church in Need and published by Zenit. The full text is available from Zenit. Here is some of what Archbishop Nona wrote:

How can we live our faith in a time of great difficulty? What can we do for those who are persecuted because of their faith? To ask this question means above all interrogating ourselves about the meaning of our faith. In order to be able to speak about the time of persecution Christians must really know their own faith. . . .

What can one do for those who are living the difficult life of persecution? . . . I came to this conclusion: During a time of crisis and persecution we must remain full of hope. And so I remained in the city, strengthened in hope, in order to give hope to the many persecuted faithful who likewise continued to live here.

Is this enough? To remain with the faithful in hope is a crucial start, but it is not enough—there has to be something more. Saint Paul reminds us that hope is linked to love, and love to faith. To remain with those who are persecuted is to give them a hope founded in love and faith. What can we do to build up this faith? I began to ask myself how our faithful were living out their faith, how they were practicing it in the difficult circumstances of every day. I realized that, above all—in the face of suffering and persecution—a true knowledge of our own faith and the cause of our persecution is of fundamental importance.

By deepening our sense of what it means to be Christians, we discover ways to give meaning to this life of persecution and find the necessary strength to endure it. To know that we may be killed at any moment, at home, in the street, at work, and yet despite all this to retain a living and active faith—this is the true challenge. . . .

My goal in all this: to reinforce the fact that the Christian faith is not an abstract, rational theory, remote from actual, everyday life, but a means of discovering its deepest meaning, its highest expression as revealed by the Incarnation. When the individual discovers this possibility, he or she will be willing to endure absolutely anything and will do everything to safeguard this discovery—even if this means having to die in its cause.

Many people living in freedom from persecution, in countries without problems like ours, ask me what they can do for us, how they can help us in our situation. First of all, anyone who wants to do something for us should make an effort to live out his or her own faith in a more profound manner, embracing the life of faith in daily practice. For us the greatest gift is to know that our situation is helping others to live out their own faith with greater strength, joy, and fidelity.

Strength in daily life; joy in everything we encounter along the path of life; confidence that the Christian faith holds the answer
to all the fundamental questions of life, as well as helping us cope with all the relatively minor incidents we confront along our way: This must be the overriding objective for all of us. And to know that there are people in this world who are persecuted on account of their faith should be a warning—to you who live in freedom—to become better, stronger Christians; a spur to demonstrating your own faith as it confronts the difficulties of your own society; and the recognition that you too are confronted with a certain degree of persecution because of your faith, even in the West . . .

When Christians are persecuted, we should take on more firmly the responsibility of our own faith to joyfully give expression to love, fidelity, and justice. If there are Christians in trouble, I should love my neighbor still more; I should be more positive in my way of looking at the business of life, in order to show those suffering the strength of my own faith.

A PRAYER FOR VOCATIONS

NPM is asking all its members to pray for vocations to pastoral music ministry on November 22, the Memorial of St. Cecilia. We invite you to use this text personally to pray for vocations or, if you desire, share it with your parish community.

O God, you have made us for yourself, with hearts to love you and voices to sing your praise. Give to your Church, we pray, devoted and skilled musicians to lead the song of your people as they join the Blessed Virgin Mary, Saint Cecilia, and all the saints in an unending hymn to your glory. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.