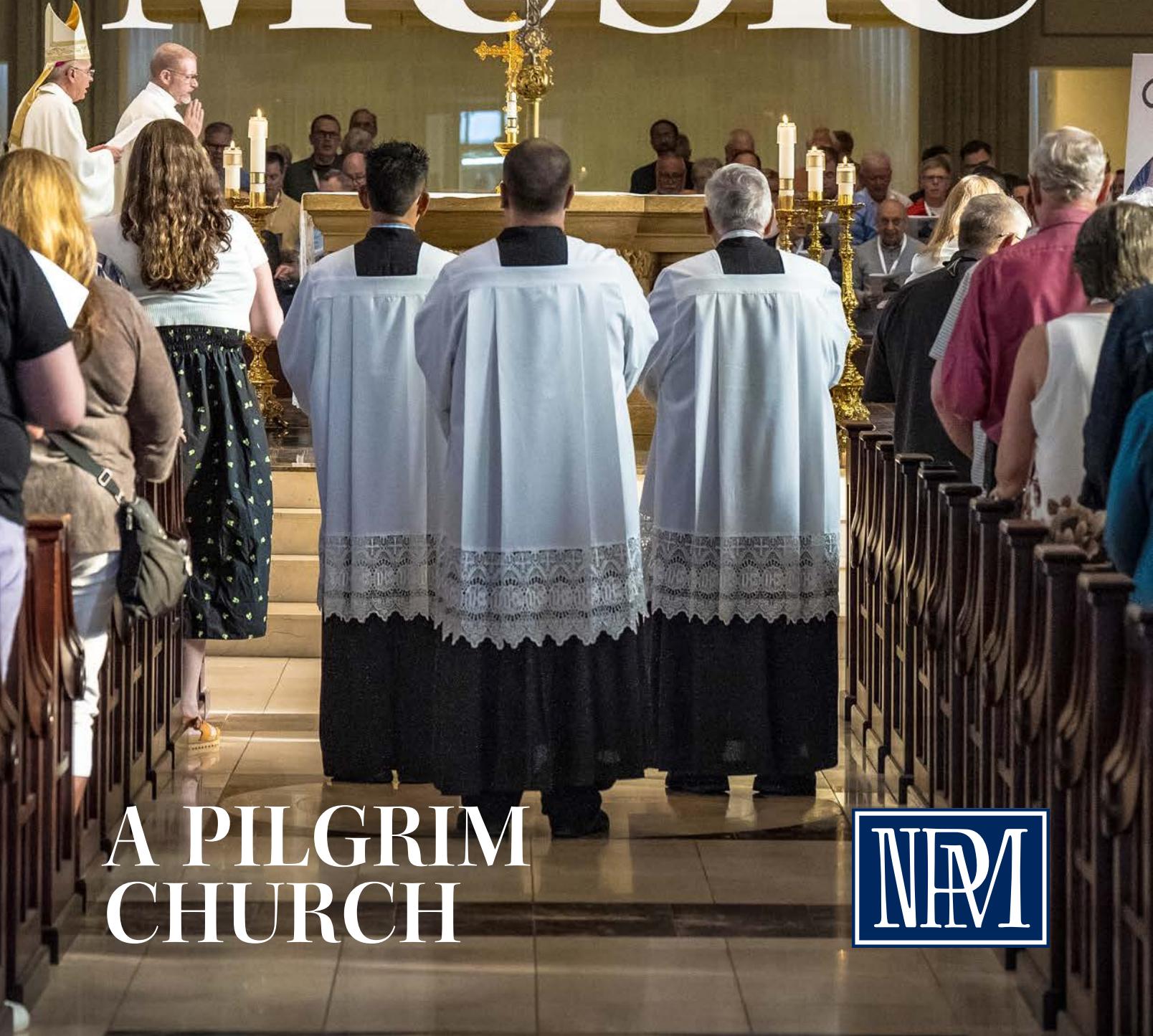


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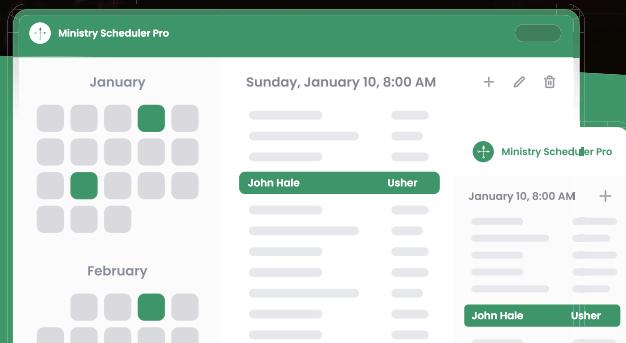
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THIS JOURNEY OF FAITH AND HOPE

My husband and I were blessed to visit the town of Lourdes during a trip to France last fall. I was amazed at the unwavering faith and hope evident among the pilgrims who came to touch the stones of the grotto where the Virgin Mary appeared to Saint Bernadette, to fill bottles with holy water from the spring, to bathe in the waters—all in search of some form of healing.

An unexpected highlight for me was touring the adjacent subterranean Basilica of Saint Pius X, who during his papacy established the episcopal see of Lourdes and authorized the beatification of Bernadette. In this astonishing underground space hang dozens of banners of saints and soon-to-be saints, from Saint John Henry Newman and Saint Sharbel Makhlouf to Blessed Carlo Acutis and Blessed Chiara Luce Badano. Standing among those immense, innumerable banners, I was filled with gratitude and felt truly a part of the communion of saints, one among many pilgrims on this journey of life.

The theme of this edition, “A Pilgrim Church,” emerges from Pope Francis’s designation of 2025 as the Jubilee Year “Pilgrims of Hope.” The pope stated in his February 2022 letter announcing the Jubilee Year, “We must fan the flame of hope that has been given us and help everyone to gain new strength and certainty by looking to the future with an open spirit, a trusting heart and far-sighted vision.”

In this issue, Vicky Tufano examines the integral nature of processions in the liturgy, as an embodiment of meaning-making for the Church. Dónal Noonan reflects on the importance of nourishing ourselves on our pilgrim journey. Michelle Rego offers suggestions for those just embarking on the path of starting to grow a choir. Father Joseph A. Brown, SJ, examines the transformative power of Black sacred song as

“Let us as pastoral musicians strive to enter boldly and whole heartedly into this vision for the Church.”

spiritual food on our journey of faith. Chaz Bowers recommends next steps to take when your parish has recently purchased new hymnals.

You’ll hear from Executive Director Jennifer Kluge and Board Chair Dolores Martinez in a candid interview about where NPM is headed. You’ll meet NPM’s 2024 scholarship award recipients, and don’t miss Robert Batastini’s article called, “Transitions,” which offers practical advice for pastoral musicians preparing to leave a position and move on to a new phase of ministry. Finally, you’re sure to enjoy our preview section highlighting the Association’s forthcoming programming and the exciting content planned for this summer’s On The Road events.

Pope Francis envisions the Jubilee Year 2025, “Pilgrims of Hope,” as a way to “[restore] a climate of hope and trust as a prelude to the renewal and rebirth that we so urgently desire...” Let us as pastoral musicians strive to enter boldly and whole heartedly into this vision for the Church. May the Lord continue to bless us as we make our pilgrim way, brothers and sisters on this journey of faith and hope.



Nancy

Nancy Douglass
Managing Editor
pmeditor@npm.org



MISSION The National Association of Pastoral Musicians fosters the art of musical liturgy. The members of NPM serve the Catholic Church in the United States as musicians, clergy, liturgists, and other leaders of prayer.

Leadership

The Board of Directors governs the association on behalf of its members. The Council represents the interests of NPM members, advises the Board, and elects the directors. The chapters and members of each region of the United States are represented on the Council, and forums of members advance the mission of the association in collaboration with the staff.

All terms conclude at the end of the calendar year.

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FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Journeys are complicated—a pilgrimage even more so. While you know that I began my journey as NPM's executive director at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, you probably don't know that I began my prior position as a chief of staff at Georgetown while my husband was deployed in the Persian Gulf. Perhaps it's fair to say that I'm drawn to the proverbial deep end of the pool; I love a good challenge.

In this issue, you'll read about themes of pilgrimage and journey, and I hope that you also notice the ideas of change and transition. I have been very open with the members and friends of NPM about our challenges and strengths and equally open about the need to reimagine our Association, so that we continue to be relevant for the next fifty years.

We know that one of the ways NPM is unique is our direct connection to the liturgy. Everything we do should elevate our liturgy and deepen the relationship between the assembly and our Lord. All of our Church documents point us back to the importance of the sung liturgy. And while we need to consider the future of NPM, one thing—our connection to the liturgy—cannot change.

It's no secret that I've been dreaming about what our Association could look like in the future, and I'm grateful for a Board and Council who are willing to go on that journey with me. You'll want to take a few minutes to read the interview Nancy Douglass conducted with me and Dolores Martinez, our Chair of the Board of Directors. Any journey worth the effort transforms us internally and externally. Some

of the changes or transformations ahead are very visible—*Pastoral Music* defaulting to a digital receipt, a different experience of summer programming with On The Road, and increased online resources and programming. Some of the steps on the journey won't be visible just yet. We are exploring what we need in order to attain long-term financial security with lower dependence on member dues, and asking what membership and affiliation mean to individuals in 2025. We're asking the tough questions: what about NPM 2.0 works and should be retained, and what should be jettisoned? Is it realistic to expect so much from members stretched thinner than ever, and if not, how do we hire additional staff to serve the needs of our ministry?

We cannot be afraid of these questions; we have to jump into the deep end of the pool. As we prepare for this pilgrimage of discernment and change, may I ask for your prayers? Your Association needs your spiritual support. I invite you to reach out to me at any time by emailing director@npm.org.

May the new calendar year bring you abundant blessings.

Peace be with you,



Jennifer

Jennifer Kluge

Executive Director

director@npm.org

ASSOCIATION NEWS

NPM Certification Highlight

NPM offers professional development certificates and certifications. These programs enable our members to strengthen and develop skills in their particular area of expertise based on a standardized scope and sequence. Current certificate offerings include Basic Cantor, Intermediate Cantor, Cantor Colleague; Basic Organ, and Basic Piano. An Advanced Piano Certificate program is in the works.

NPM Cantor Certificate adjudications are conducted virtually. This means that candidates can work with the Certificate Administrator to arrange a mutually convenient timeline for submitting their video and scheduling a feedback session on Zoom with the adjudicators. The written tests are administered in the candidate's parish with a local proctor. They may be taken either before or after the vocal adjudication.

The only part of the cantor certification process that is completed on a specified date is the Colleague Liturgy Exam for Cantor Colleague Certificate (CCC) candidates. This exam is sent and submitted via email. In 2025, the CCC Colleague Liturgy Exam will be offered on February 7, June 6, and October 10.

You can find more information on NPM's Piano, Organ, and Cantor Certificate programs on page 58 of this issue, or visit npm.org/certificates-and-certification.

Congratulations to NPM's Newest Certificate Recipients!

Basic Cantor Certificate

James Lewis
Kimberly Perales
Lorena Vidal Vasquez

A message to our Premium-level members

As the National Office prepares for our 2025 summer programming across the country, we will not be holding a Colloquium this year. We encourage all members to plan to attend the NPM On The Road event nearest you. See page 60 of this issue for a preview of the planned On The Road content.

In Memoriam

As we look forward to the year ahead, we also reflect upon the losses we experienced in 2024. Not only did we lose valued, longtime members of NPM, but we also tragically lost leaders in the pastoral music field. We mourn the loss of Wendy Silhavy, Director of Music for the Office of Divine Worship in the Archdiocese of Chicago and valued member of the NPM Programming Forum. We also mourn the loss of Rosina Hendrickson, Training and Events Coordinator at Liturgy Training Publications, who passed away suddenly in November. May the souls of the NPM community and all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.



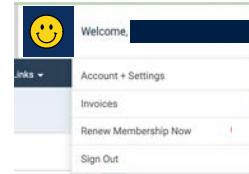
An Important Announcement Regarding Pastoral Music magazine

Starting with the April 2025 edition, the default delivery method for Pastoral Music Magazine will be changed to DIGITAL ONLY.

From January 10 through March 10, 2025, members can opt in to continue their print delivery using the steps below:

Step 1: Visit the NPM Music Room (NPM.org - My NPM Account - The NPM Music Room) and log in using your Music Room credentials.

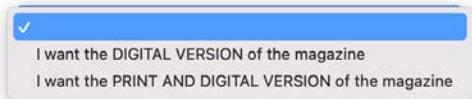
Step 2: Select the drop-down options next to your profile picture (right hand corner) and select “Account + Settings”.



Step 3: Scroll to the section titled “Additional Information”. The first option will be titled “Pastoral Music Magazine Preference.”



Step 4: Click the drop-down and select which delivery option you'd like for Pastoral Music magazine. The options are “digital only” or “digital and print”.

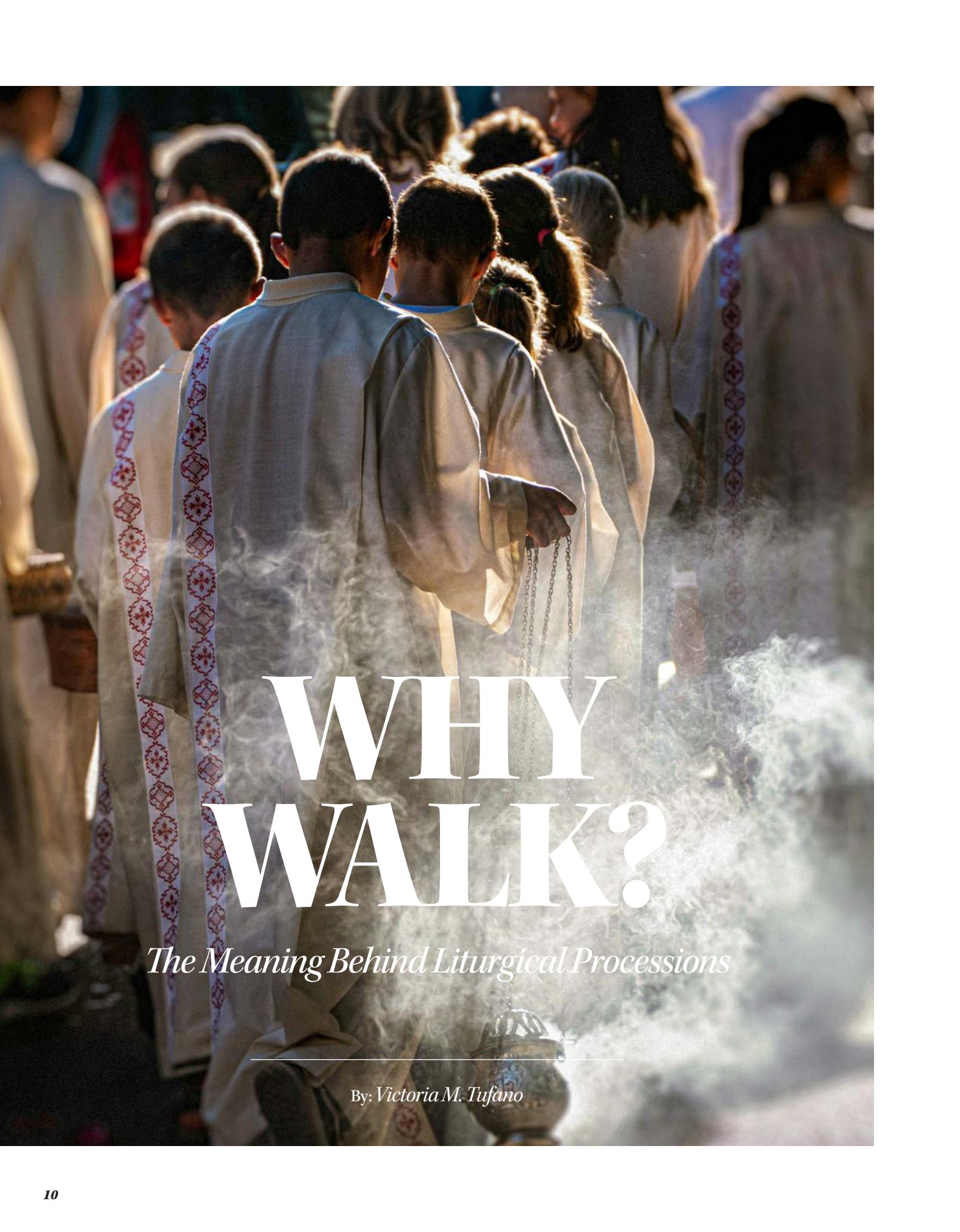


Members who do not complete these steps by March 10, 2025 will default to the digital-only version of the magazine.

Contact the NPM National Office at npmsing@npm.org for additional support.

Thank you for your help as we work to make our publications more eco-friendly!





WHY WALK?

The Meaning Behind Liturgical Processions

By: Victoria M. Tufano

On Friday, November 15, 2024, “The Virgin of Paris” was returned to Notre-Dame Cathedral in preparation for the first Mass to be celebrated there, on December 8, 2024, since fire ravaged the cathedral in 2019. The fourteenth-century statue of the Blessed Virgin Mary and the Christ Child emerged undamaged from the fire and was moved to the Church Saint-Germain-l’Auxerrois, where it remained until November 15, when hundreds of people accompanied the statue in a candle-lit procession back to the cathedral.

Why did hundreds of Parisians slowly walk more than a mile on a chilly November evening to accompany a six-foot stone statue that could much more easily have been transported by truck in minutes during daylight hours? Perhaps they wanted to be part of a momentous event in their city’s history, or to ease a bit the shock they had experienced when the Cathedral, an icon of their city, burned, or to welcome back an image that had given them a mother’s comfort or a sense of human dignity. Whatever their reasons, they did what humans always do to express what words alone cannot: They enacted a meaning. They performed what they longed for. They made a symbol.

The symbol that was made in this case was a procession, based on the simple human act of walking or otherwise moving together in the same direction, heightened somewhat by an agreed-upon ceremonial order appropriate to the occasion.

So, what did this particular symbol mean? That’s both the right question and the wrong one, or maybe just a question that can be both unanswerable and infinitely answerable at the same time. It likely meant all the things proposed above to some participants. If asked, each person who participated would likely respond differently, some similarly and others uniquely. And each would be true, because each person brought to this symbol their own experiences, imaginations, hopes, and more. The woman who placed her flowers before that statue on her wedding day, the art historian who lectures about the statue, the tourist seeing it for the first time, the parishioners and clergy who watched and wept as the cathedral burned—all are united in one symbolic action, and individual in the meanings the symbol carries.

Every Catholic liturgy is a symphony comprising hundreds of symbolic acts by which we proclaim and perform what we believe. Through repetition,

“Every Catholic liturgy is a symphony comprising hundreds of symbolic acts by which we proclaim and perform what we believe. Through repetition, imitation, and catechesis we learn how to do, how to enact, how to perform the great mysteries of our faith.”

imitation, and catechesis we learn how to do, how to enact, how to perform the great mysteries of our faith. By these actions, which we make with our bodies, we incarnate these symbols. We take them to ourselves and give them flesh. We express them with voice and gesture, with silence and stillness, with singing and listening.

One of the most common of these symbolic acts is the procession. During the celebration of Sunday Eucharist, there may be as many as seven processions. They express different aspects of our life and worship, adding physical expression to the understanding of our minds and hearts.

Entrance Procession

The *Roman Missal* says, “When the people are gathered, the Priest approaches the altar with the ministers while the Entrance Chant is sung.”¹ The current missal and most of the historical prescriptions for the beginning of the Mass don’t exactly prescribe that the Mass is to begin with a procession, just that the entrance antiphon begins when the celebrant (priest or bishop) nears the altar. The entrance procession as



“...at some point, they go out the door and process, on foot or on wheels, to the church, where they greet each other and settle into their seats until they are called again to be one body, one voice, one people who offer praise and thanksgiving to the one God.”

we know it seems to be more a product of architecture than of ritual need. If the sacristy was situated near the entrance of the church, a procession was necessary for an orderly approach of the ministers to the altar. Since the entrance antiphons were short, the procession was accompanied by a longer chant, which stopped before the celebrant approached the altar so that the proper entrance antiphon could be intoned. Even when it became the custom to build sacristies near the sanctuary, the practice of an entrance procession persisted. So now, in many churches, we are used to seeing the vested priest and other ministers leave the sacristy and walk down a side aisle to the back of the church to begin the procession.

Well before that happens, however, the members of the assembly enact their own entrance procession. Many have Sunday morning rituals that differ from those of other mornings. Some enjoy a more elaborate breakfast or an extra cup of coffee. Some sleep in a little later, others may rise earlier to extend the day a bit. Some have little ones that need to be washed and dressed and fed, or spouses or teens that need to be coaxed out of bed. But at some point, they go out the door and process, on foot or on wheels, to the church, where they greet each other and settle into their seats until they are called again to be one body, one voice, one people who offer praise and thanksgiving to the one God.

Gospel Procession

The Gospel procession as we know it today has much in common with that described in *Ordo Romano I*, a ritual book that describes the directions for the Mass, probably from the seventh or eighth century. It says that the deacon receives a blessing from the pope, who says, in Latin, “May the Lord be in your heart and on your lips,” which is the first part of what the priest says when he blesses the deacon before the Gospel nowadays. The document then continues, saying the deacon takes the Gospel book from the altar, where he had earlier placed it, and carries it to the ambo accompanied by two acolytes with candles.

A later document notes that the deacon announces the reading, to which the people respond, in Latin, “Glory to you, Lord”; at the end of the Gospel reading, they say,

“Praise to you, Christ.” These are similar to the words with which we respond today to the proclamation of the Gospel. It is interesting to note that these phrases address Christ in the second person, as he himself has addressed us in the proclamation of the Gospel.

Dismissal of Catechumens

Ancient Church sources testify that unbaptized people who had formally entered into a relationship with the Christian community with the intention of being baptized would be admitted to the celebration of the Word of God at Mass and then dismissed before the Profession of Faith for further instruction.

The practice of both the catechumenate and this dismissal died out almost completely by about the sixth century, but the remnant could be found in the title of the first part of the Mass, the Mass of the Catechumens, which was used until the reform of the liturgy following the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965). Responding to the experience of missionaries who, since the sixteenth century, had been attempting to revive the catechumenate, this same council called for its reestablishment. In 1972, the Church officially reestablished the catechumenate, including the dismissal of catechumens, with the publication of the *Ordo initiationis christianaæ adulorum*, now called the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults in English.

The practice of dismissing catechumens in the early centuries of the Church may have begun partly to keep the sacred rites and beliefs of the Church from being known to outsiders (a practice known as the *disciplina arcani*, the “discipline of the secret”). Its greater value, though, was in assuring that those who would be baptized would have an understanding of Scripture, Church teaching, and Christian life to prepare to make the commitment of Baptism.

This dismissal takes place after the homily, before the Profession of Faith. The celebrant addresses the catechumens, instructing them to leave with their catechist to reflect on the Word of God they just heard proclaimed and preached. In many parishes, their leaving is accompanied by song, perhaps an acclamation that is used consistently for this purpose or a repetition of the response for the day’s psalm, if appropriate.



“The eyes of all look hopefully to you and you give them their food in due time.”

Offertory Procession

In the early Church, and even into the eleventh century in some places, the faithful brought their offerings to the liturgy in the form of bread, wine, oil, poultry, cheese, and other in-kind gifts, which they placed on the altar or handed over the altar rail to the deacons at the offertory. These gifts were primarily for the Church's service to the poor and for the support of the clergy. From these gifts, an appropriate amount of bread and wine for the Eucharist was chosen.

This practice was time consuming, but our ancestors in the faith were not concerned with getting Mass over in an hour. The practice began to fall into disuse around the seventh century, when the preference for unleavened bread for the Mass became widespread and when the practice of private Masses, for which monetary stipends were given for personal intentions, became common.

In our own day, the offertory procession is preceded by the passing of baskets in as efficient a manner as possible, which is something of a procession in its own right. With many people choosing to make their monetary offerings online, this process has become even shorter than in the recent past.

The actual bringing forward of the gifts is often quite simple. In contrast, in the Orthodox Church, the moment when the gifts of bread and wine are brought to the altar is known as the Great Entrance, one of the most prominent moments of the Divine Liturgy. It is carried out by the priest and deacon, accompanied by servers with cross, candles, and liturgical fans (*hexapteryga*). While the Roman liturgy is traditionally more sedate than the Orthodox liturgy, we might ponder how to bring greater attention to our gifts as they are presented on our behalf.

Communion Procession

The Communion procession is the most essential and, historically, the most complicated part of the liturgy. At different times and in different places, the laity received Communion standing, kneeling on the floor or at a rail, or seated in their places; in the sanctuary or at a side altar; in the hand, on the tongue, or on a white cloth; from the chalice, from a separate cup, or from a glass tube; after first genuflecting, washing their hands, kissing the floor, or kissing the priest's foot; with hands folded or hands extended and perhaps by other methods. All of these methods were used with the same concerns we have today: reverence, propriety, simplicity.

The reception of Communion was accompanied by song at least as early as the fourth century. St. John Chrysostom mentions that the refrain of one such song was taken from Psalm 145: "The eyes of all look hopefully to you and you give them their food in due time."

Recessional Procession

The missal doesn't actually call for a recessional procession. In discussing various forms of celebrating Mass (Mass without a deacon, Mass with a deacon, and concelebrated Mass), the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* notes that at a Mass with a deacon, the

priest and deacon "withdraw in a manner similar to the Entrance Procession."² For the other two forms of Mass, it merely says the priest withdraws. In the United States, it seems, at least on Sundays, that a departure "similar to the Entrance Procession" is the norm. While it certainly facilitates the greeting of parishioners after Mass, it also indicates that the priest, like members of the assembly, is to go in peace, to glorify the Lord with his life.

Corpus Christi Procession

One procession that takes place in many parishes around the world is the Corpus Christi procession, which originated with Juliana of Mont-Cornillon, of Liège, who died in 1258 and was canonized in 1869. A pious woman with a great devotion to the Eucharist, Juliana worked tirelessly for a feast celebrating the Body and Blood of Christ. She lived to see the feast become a diocesan celebration, but it was not declared a universal feast until 1261, three years after her death, and did not begin to be celebrated universally until 1350, after which processions became linked to the feast. Corpus Christi is celebrated in the United States on the Sunday after the Solemnity of the Most Holy Trinity. The procession with the Blessed Sacrament takes place following the celebration of the Eucharist.

Endnotes:

¹ *Roman Missal*, Third Edition, no. 1.

² *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*, Third Edition, no. 186.



Victoria M. Tufano is a liturgist who has served in a diocesan office, in parish ministry, and as an editor at Liturgy Training Publications in Chicago. She served as a team member for the North American Forum on the Catechumenate and has written articles and books on liturgical topics, particularly Christian initiation. She is enjoying an active retirement.

A circular view from an airplane window looking out over a dense, sprawling suburban landscape. The area is filled with numerous houses, roads, and several large, winding lakes. The perspective is from high above, showing the organized grid of the neighborhood and the natural water bodies. The window frame is visible in the foreground, and the sky is a clear, pale blue.

INTERVIEW

Hope for the Future

By: *Nancy Douglass*

I recently was blessed to sit down in conversation with Board Chair Dolores Martinez and Executive Director Jennifer Kluge. Read on for a glimpse into the inner workings of the leadership of our Association and a hopeful look at what lies ahead for NPM.

Nancy Douglass: Dolores, you're finishing your first year as Chairperson after several years as a Board member. What has your experience been like?

Dolores Martinez: When I came onto the Board, there were many governing documents, and the meetings kept very tight to the agenda. Lately we have started to give ourselves permission to be less tied to procedure. As a result, we are looking at some things that we have never looked at before and doing so from a “30,000-foot view” to see all the aspects of how the organization is run.

Nancy: Could you tell us a bit about the “dance” that’s involved between the Executive Director and the Board?

Dolores: Jennifer is always reminding the Board that we need to give her marching orders, rather than relying on her to give us marching orders. This places the responsibility on the shoulders of the Board members to examine issues and make decisions instead of looking to Jennifer to guide us and give us permission for everything.

Jennifer Kluge: According to our bylaws, the Board governs and empowers the Executive Director to execute the mission and vision of the organization. Our Board members are action-oriented, so there is a balancing act between shaping the Association at a higher level versus shaping the details. That dance can get complicated. Occasionally we need to embrace the dissonance between strategic planning and strategic visioning. There is policy on one side with the Board and operations on the other side with the Executive Director and the National Staff. The strategic planning is where they dovetail together. The elegance of our relationship is that the Board tells me what they want me to do, and I come back to them with a plan. If we don’t have the resources to realize that plan, I tell them that I can execute the plan to—for example—fifty percent of what they envision, but I need something more, whether it’s financial resources, more membership hours, or whatever it might be. That is where the partnership comes into play.

Nancy: Jennifer, at our Members’ Meeting at the National Convention in Kansas City last summer, you were very transparent about the state of NPM. What updates can you give our readers?

Jennifer: After my comments during the Members’ Meeting and Bishop Mark Seitz’s fervorino at the Convention Eucharist, we received some additional grassroots support. Combined with subsequent support—including a very generous member’s \$12,500 matching donation—we have raised close to \$40,000. But the work continues. We are being excellent stewards of our resources, cutting costs and streamlining whenever possible and addressing our debt. We want to be financially solvent, and that will require aggressive work. In the coming months, we plan to leverage our partnerships more effectively, reach out to build new relationships, and embark on some grant writing.

Nancy: What do these challenges mean for our members?

Jennifer: Beginning with this issue of *Pastoral Music*, we are shifting from a five-issue cycle to a four-issue cycle. In lieu of five issues of 48-56 pages, we are moving to four 64-page issues. Our members who receive the magazine will receive the same amount of content, but in four issues rather than five. This model presents significant savings in printing, layout, and postage costs. In addition, starting with the April issue of *Pastoral Music*, we will default to a digital subscription. It is important to be responsible financial and environmental stewards. We do know that some members want to have a break from screen time and hold the magazine in their hands, so we are committed to offering a print version, but members will have to opt in to receive it.

The National Staff recently completed a transition to a completely virtual office. We are all working from home now, using Zoom for meetings and Slack for internal messaging, as well as a desktop phone service. Our members will see no change to the service they receive from the National Office. The only change they will experience is that we now have one mailing address to a lockbox for check payments, and a different post office box mailing address for all other correspondence.

“We are a diverse church, and NPM can be the unifying element among liturgical musicians and among our clergy, working with them directly.”

Nancy: Dolores, I know the Board met recently and devoted significant time to organizing task forces as part of its work. What do those task forces involve?

Dolores: Some people might be wondering what the difference is between these task forces and the Forums that have been in place for NPM. These task forces will share the work of visioning but also of accomplish some of the work behind the vision. They will include all the people who serve on the Council—the Regional Representatives, Forum Chairs, and Board members, and Jennifer as an *ex officio* member. These task forces were created so that we could see forward movement for the Association in a shorter period of time in strategic areas of the organization: branding, membership, finance, programming, and structure and governance.

In terms of branding, how do we describe ourselves to the public? How do we get our message out, and who are our target audiences? The finance task force will examine our relationship with our industry partners and turn over every rock to find potential donors—people we can bring on board as partners to move the vision of NPM forward with their financial support. Membership will be studying our current membership structure, envisioning what a new structure could look like, and examining how we can reach out to new members and make it easier for people to access “all things NPM.” In addition to music directors, we want to reach choir members, cantors, accompanists, ensemble members, everybody who could potentially be a member of NPM. The programming task force will solicit input as to what types of offerings people are looking for and try to expand our programming beyond our Convention. This year’s On The Road events are a new way for NPM to get out around the country. We will also look at what we offer in terms of webinars and on-demand content videos. Further down the road, presenters might offer regional on-site workshops. The job of the task forces is to see what people in the field need.

Jennifer: We are asking that bigger questions of what is missing from our content that we need to add and even what NPM needs to offer in order to be attractive and relevant for the next half-century.

Dolores: The final task force is structure and governance, which is examining NPM 2.0 to determine whether that structure is working for us. If it is not working for us, then why, and how are we going to change that? NPM 2.0 was meant to be member-led and staff-executed. Now we are moving more toward a member-advised organization, where membership will still have a stake in how everything looks, but in order to execute, we will need an expanded staff.

Jennifer: We realize that asking an individual to participate in an authentically member-led way is asking somebody to, for all intents and purposes, take on another part-time job, for free. While we need the advice of our members in order to guide our work moving forward—because how can we be a membership association if we do not take into account our members’ views and values—the practical reality is that we need more staff in order to actually realize that vision.

Dolores: There is a Board member chairing each task force, who has received mandates—that is, the questions that we talked about at our last Board meeting. These questions will move the task forces’ conversations along in a timely manner, so they can determine concrete answers and move the agenda forward. We came away from our meeting very hopeful.

Nancy: What can our members expect from the NPM On The Road events this summer?

Jennifer: At each of the six locations, members can anticipate a joint-publisher reading session, a two-part keynote address, and four workshops offered in the morning and then repeated in the afternoon. Each

location will also have a concert featuring some of the extraordinary local talent, including the University of the Incarnate Word Cardinal Singers in San Antonio, the Saint Clement's Schola in Chicago, and a multicultural event in Oakland. One of the parts that I am most excited about is something called, "The Extra Beat," which will especially highlight things of great local importance. In Atlanta, we will offer a civil rights walk to highlight the extraordinary work of the women and men of the civil rights movement. In San Antonio, and hopefully in Oakland as well, we will feature a tour of the missions.

We are simplifying our pricing structure for On The Road: we will have two prices, a member and a non-member price. The non-member will include in that a few months' trial membership, so those people who are new to NPM or coming back to NPM can hear from us on a regular basis and learn more about the work we are doing, especially as we shift toward planning for our next fifty years.

Dolores: On the first night, there will be a reception. There are very reasonable hotel options, and several locations will offer on-campus housing as an even more economical choice—the University of the Incarnate Word in San Antonio, the University of Portland in Oregon, and Rosemont College in Philadelphia.

Nancy: Jennifer, can you tell our readers anything about the plans for the Association's fiftieth anniversary?

Jennifer: I hope to formally announce the dates and an official location in the coming months. We plan for our event to be in the greater Washington, DC, area. This is certainly a time to celebrate the incredible work of NPM over the past fifty years and the extraordinary changes that have happened within our Church. NPM was founded to help pastoral musicians navigate the post-conciliar world and in turn, animate assemblies to sing. That is something to celebrate and something to build upon for the next fifty years. We have to continually remind our brothers and sisters in the assembly that singing at Mass is a privilege for all of us.

Dolores: I remember the thrill of becoming a trained cantor whose purpose was to animate the assembly to raise their voices in a new way that had not been done prior to the Second Vatical Council. We need to celebrate that—it is the way we pray.

Jennifer: I am passionate about claiming our role as the assembly, but also maintaining our role as pastoral musicians in our relationship with the assembly and with the clergy.

Dolores: Yes, the laity and the clergy are coworkers in the vineyard. With the recent Synod on Synodality, this is a wonderful time to bring clergy back to the table and move forward in a synodal fashion, using the USCCB's *Co-workers in the Vineyard of the Lord* as a base document.

Jennifer: I love that, Dolores. That is another way that our fiftieth anniversary is so important: we are a diverse church, and NPM can be the unifying element among liturgical musicians and among our clergy, working with them directly. We have such a special role to play in bringing unity to our ministry.

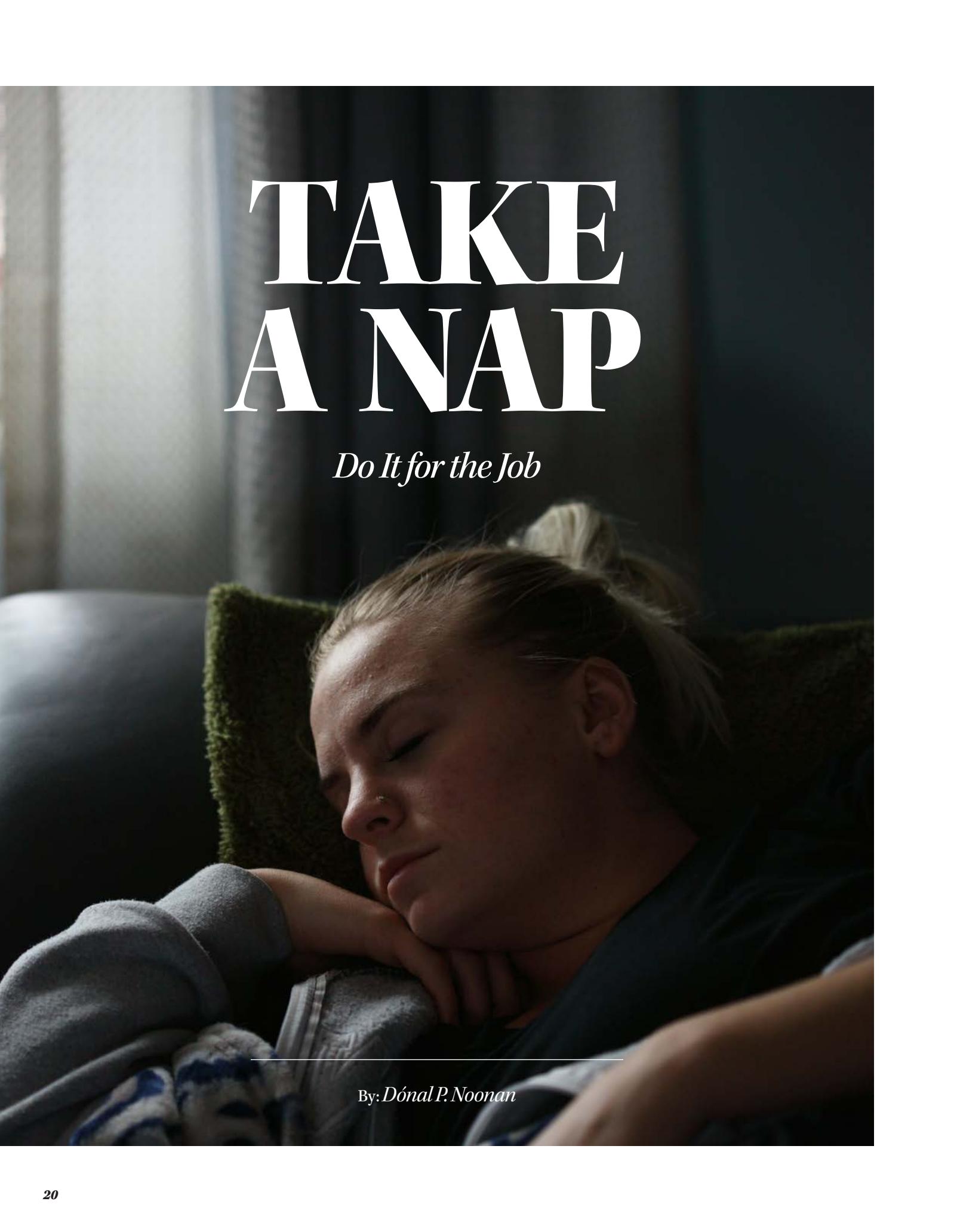
Nancy: Is there anything else you'd like to tell our readers?

Dolores: Sometimes I talk to former members of NPM and ask them, "What did NPM mean to you?" People remember enthusiastically, and they can name the value of the Association for them. I would say that, if we can spark that memory in members of the past and get them excited about the next fifty years, they can become the heralds of the future. That might talk to young people, clergy, or potential donors and say, "This is the value you can find in NPM!" How can we re-ignite this passion for NPM?

The second thing I would say is that we have all heard people today say that they don't get anything out of going to church. But the *Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy* calls us to bring something to the liturgy, to do something in the liturgy. Similarly, we as pastoral musicians need to bring something to NPM, to do something for NPM. I will not forget the things I learned through NPM at the Choral Directors' Institute that honed my conducting skills, my organ skills, and my cantor skills. These things are a part of me. So, what can I bring back? What can I contribute to NPM in a fresh way?

TAKE A NAP

Do It for the Job

A close-up, low-angle photograph of a woman sleeping peacefully on a couch. She is leaning her head against a dark green, textured pillow. Her eyes are closed, and a gentle smile is on her face. She is wearing a dark t-shirt. The background is dark, and the lighting is soft, highlighting her face and the texture of the couch.

By: Dónal P. Noonan

We've all heard the Benjamin Franklin saying, "There will be sleeping enough in the grave," or as I know it, "You can sleep when you're dead." However, today we're going to talk about something that all of us as church musicians, music ministers, and musicians in general need to take a moment to think about: finding rest and growth in our ministry, and maybe not waiting until the grave to do so. You might think the two words "rest" and "growth" are not the best pair to go together—an oxymoron of sorts—but what does it take to grow? When your brain is full, what's the one thing you need? Sleep, rest, and rehabilitation for both mind and body.

I know what you're thinking: Rest? Who has time for that between planning Masses, rehearsing choirs, and making sure the organ doesn't do that funky thing it does every time you play the trill in "Trumpet Voluntary" at nearly every wedding—on the 8ft trumpet stop on the swell manual! But the truth is, without rest and a clear mind, even the most seasoned pastoral musicians and well-oiled music ministries can fall apart, very much like when the sound system goes on strike right before the final blessing and closing hymn. Yes, friends, we've all been there.

So today, we're going to look at some practical—and sometimes humorous—ways we can find rest and growth in our ministry, because let's be honest: if we don't find the humor in what we do, we might just collapse in the corner and cry ourselves to sleep. But hey, isn't getting some sleep the whole point?

1. Retreat.

Let's start with the classic: the spiritual retreat, or what I like to call "the necessary spiritual disappearing act." I'm talking about stepping away from the craziness we call life—the chaos of the office, the madness of the school run, liturgy meetings, rehearsal prep, home life, church life, etc. I mean taking time to stop, listen, and just be with the Creator.

I've heard plenty of excuses for why this can't be done. In fact, I've given plenty of excuses myself! But the reality is, without stepping out of the hustle and bustle to reconnect with God, how can you expect to hear God's call through all the noise? There's plenty of precedent for this—Jesus did it! In the Gospel according to Luke, we hear, "But Jesus often withdrew

"Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed. If Jesus needed time alone, how much more do we need time to simply be?"

to lonely places and prayed" (Luke 5:16, NIV). Now, if Jesus needed time alone, how much more do we need time to simply be?

We need to be okay with taking time for prayer, reflection, and spiritual growth—especially after you've just finished searching for that infamous missing choir robe or the hymnal that mysteriously sprouted legs and wandered off. A retreat doesn't have to be anything fancy. You don't need to climb a mountain or head off to some monastery where you channel your inner Maria von Trapp (spoiler alert).

It could be as simple as a day at a retreat center or even just an afternoon drive to somewhere peaceful where you can be still. However, if you can, I recommend visiting a retreat center for a few days to really disconnect from the lift and reconnect yourself with the Father. If you can't, just taking a few hours away—somewhere you can read, listen to music, and spend one to two hours a week on your own—can make all the difference. A retreat doesn't have to be huge to be effective; it just needs to be meaningful and mindful.

2. Share the baton.

We pastoral musicians are great planners. We excel at doing, organizing, leading, putting out fires—sometimes even starting them (we should probably work on that last one). But when it comes to taking care of ourselves, well... let's just say we're often "challenged." We're the first to remind our choir and ministry members to take their allergy medications during allergy season and load up on vitamins. In winter, we urge them to wrap up warmly, drive safely to rehearsal, and, of course, load up on vitamins. Summer?



“It’s so important for us to take our Sabbath—whatever we choose to call it—whether it’s a day on the weekend or during the week. We must take that time to rest, recharge, and be so we can continue to serve the Kingdom.”

Sunscreen and—you guessed it—vitamins! We never hesitate to suggest self-care for others. But what do we tell ourselves?

The constant refrain of “When this is over...,” “After Christmas...,” or “During summer...” becomes our mantra. But guess what, friends? There’s no time like the present! Seize the day and pass the baton to someone else.

For the past several years, I’ve been working with the School of Music at a local university, mentoring graduate choral conducting students as part of their work placement internships. They’ve been a fantastic help in my ministry. But here’s the thing—because I’ve been leaning on my students, my choir members have become somewhat disengaged. They want to help with our ministry. They want to be involved in the nitty-gritty of making the music happen. Let them.

When you trust others, you empower them to step into ministerial leadership. Isn’t that what leadership is—empowering others to take charge? Maybe I missed the memo, but I always thought that being a leader meant ensuring that others grow in their roles within our faith communities. And I’m not just talking about the young people—I mean every age group. People want to help; they need to be asked and invited.

So, pass the hymnal, and enjoy the music that can be made without you always at the helm. That’s a pretty great analogy, if I do say so myself!

3. What is this Sabbath you speak of?

I was recently talking with my wonderful friend Tom, a Presbyterian minister in Cambridge, Massachusetts. It was a typical Monday FaceTime catch-up, and he asked how my weekend went and what I had planned for the week. After I gave him a detailed rundown of everything on my plate, to my surprise, he interrupted me: “Hold up! When is your Sabbath?”

Naturally, my smart Irish mouth kicked in, and I replied, “I’m Catholic and work for the Church, Tom—I don’t do this Sabbath thing, and we don’t read that Bible thing either!” He wasn’t having it. He looked at me, raised an eyebrow at me, and brought me back down to earth: “Even Jesus took a Sabbath, Dónal—and he didn’t read the Bible either!” Reflecting on this conversation, I realized two things: 1) I need new

friends, and 2) I have great friends who call me out on my ridiculousness. In the Gospel according to Mark, Jesus tells his disciples, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest” (Mark 6:31, NIV).

In Genesis, during the creation story, even God rests on the seventh day, thus creating the first Sabbath. It’s so important for us to take our Sabbath—whatever we choose to call it—whether it’s a day on the weekend or during the week. We must take that time to rest, recharge, and be so we can continue to serve the Kingdom. Should I bring up the word “vacation”? One of the cultural hurdles I’ve had to navigate is the complicated relationship many Americans have with vacations. The question of whether we live to work or work to live goes out the window when it comes to ministry, because it overlaps so much with vocation and mission. Come close, family. Listen up at the back. Take. Your. Vacation. Do it for yourself. Do it for your family. Do it so you can recharge for your ministry. I don’t know about you, but when I’m relaxed, and stress is a distant memory, that’s when ideas flow and creativity peaks. So, do it!

4. Seek out continuing education. (We don’t know everything, despite what we might think!)

Now that we’ve just returned from a six-month cruise around the world (or at least from the idea of a vacation), let’s talk about growth. Yes, here it is again—this rest-and-growth oxymoron. But stay with me!

Often, with the cyclical nature of the liturgical calendar, we too become cyclical. When you’ve been doing “the job” for a while, it’s tempting to repeat things. Why reinvent the wheel every time when you’ve already developed a program that worked just fine? But when does this approach become stagnant and uninspired?

This is why continuing education is so important. Whether it’s attending a summer conference, a weekend seminar, an online webinar, or a book study, staying curious and expanding your knowledge keeps you engaged and excited about both your art and ministry.

As Albert Einstein said, “Once you stop learning, you start dying.” For many of us, these conferences, seminars, and workshops are life-giving, offering a perfect blend of new ideas, practical experiences,



“This journey of life—this pilgrimage we are on—is a constant exchange of love and inspiration. We’re held to a standard that can sometimes feel daunting, but the rewards are beyond belief. How unbelievably blessed we are to be on this pilgrimage of learning and growing together.”

and networking opportunities with people who understand the unique balance of music ministry and life. Such communities, like NPM, offer collegiality, friendship, and support. This should never be overlooked or undervalued.

5. Go to Mass—not to work.

When I first started working for the Church, a gentleman in Ireland told me, “Don’t let working for the Church kill your faith or destroy your ability to worship.” At the time, I had no idea what he was talking about. Now? Oh boy, do I get it!

One of the things I miss most about working for the Church is actually going to Mass. I mean, sure, we’re at every Mass, we lead every hymn, but how often are we truly worshiping?

I suggest finding ways to participate in worship that don’t involve a leadership role. Attend a Mass where you’re not responsible for anything—whether that’s at your own parish or another one. Sit in the back, sing along, and just be in God’s presence. It’s refreshing. And you’ll probably notice things about the Mass or the readings that you’ve missed when you’re focused on leading.

6. Let the fun begin—we are more than our job.

Finally, let’s talk about activities outside of work. I always cringe when people ask me, “What do you do for fun?” Is sleep an acceptable answer? Probably not. Ask yourself: what interests you outside of music? It’s an unreasonably hard question for many of us: our passion has become our career (and I know that’s true for me). But what happens when you find yourself driving home in silence, with no music playing? Where’s your passion then?

Find something that brings you joy. No, I’m not quoting Marie Kondo here, but if organizing closets does it for you, then go for it! For me, I’ve dabbled in paint-by-number, audiobooks, and even gardening (or, as I like to call it, “the organized murder of organic matter”).

Whatever you choose, make sure it’s something that’s yours or something you can share with a loved one. A hobby is a great way to connect or reconnect with your spouse. A few years ago, I joined a Monday night kickball league. It was hysterical, and a whole other article on how to captain a team in a sport you’ve never played before and live to tell the tale!

Concluding Thoughts

All of these things—taking Sabbath, continuing education, stepping back from work at Mass, and finding joy outside of work—can help you recharge, renew, and bring your best self to ministry. When we bring the best version of ourselves to ministry, we inspire others to leadership, to prayer, and maybe most importantly, to bringing their best to what they do.

This journey of life—this pilgrimage we are on—is a constant exchange of love and inspiration. We’re held to a standard that can sometimes feel daunting, but the rewards are beyond belief. How unbelievably blessed we are to be on this pilgrimage of learning and growing together.

Now, go take a nap.



Dónal P. Noonan is a music minister, educator, and choral director with over two decades of experience in music ministry and non-profit management. Originally from Ireland, Dónal has been living and working in the United States for over twenty years. He holds a Master of Arts in Music & Music Education from Teachers College, Columbia University in New York, and a Bachelor of Arts in Educational Studies. Based in Atlanta, Georgia, Dónal is Director of Music Ministries at the Catholic Shrine of the Immaculate Conception and serves as Archdiocesan Choir Director for the Archdiocese of Atlanta. Dónal is the founder of the Atlanta Homeward Choir, a musical arts organization that works with those who have ever battled homelessness, using the power of music to build community and inspire hope.



VOICES

Meet NPM's 2024 Academic Scholarship Winners



Jonathan Branton

Dr. James Kosnik Scholarship

Jonathan Branton is the Director of Music and Liturgy at Resurrection Catholic Church in Lakeland, Florida, where he has faithfully served for four years. Currently pursuing a Master's degree in theology from Saint John's University in Collegeville, Minnesota, Jonathan also studied at Alverno College as part of his commitment to liturgical excellence. A former Region 14 Representative for NPM, he has also contributed significantly to the field through his roles on his Diocesan Liturgical Commission and Diocesan Music Committee. Known for his engaging parish and diocesan workshops, Jonathan emphasizes the integral role of music in the liturgy, inspiring both his congregation and fellow liturgical ministers to deepen their understanding of worship. His dedication to fostering spiritually enriching liturgical experiences continues to impact his community and diocese.

Jonathan began his journey in music ministry around age ten, thanks to his parish music director, who was forming a children's choir for Christmas. Jonathan was already involved in music at school and decided to join. That experience led him to audition for a professional boys' choir in Orlando associated with Saint Luke's Episcopal Cathedral. Shortly after that, Jonathan's parish music director invited him to sing with the adult choir on Sundays. At the same time, Jonathan was also taking piano lessons, so a few years later, when the parish needed a pianist for a new contemporary ensemble, he had his first experience playing during the liturgy, which deepened his understanding of the role of music in worship.

Jonathan first became involved with NPM in 2014, his initial year as a full-time parish musician. A mentor and colleague from the Diocesan Office encouraged

him to attend the national convention, recognizing the value it could bring to his new role in church ministry. That year's convention in Grand Rapids revealed to Jonathan the strong sense of collegiality and support within the Association, which has had a lasting impact on his work in liturgical music.

Jonathan's favorite part of being a pastoral musician is the opportunity to deepen the worship experience for the congregation and to see the individual skills of the parish musicians grow. Through music, he is able to help create moments that inspire prayer, foster a sense of community, and elevate the liturgy. Jonathan finds it incredibly rewarding to see how music can open hearts to a more profound encounter with the sacred.

For Jonathan, this issue's theme, "A Pilgrim Church," paints the Church as a community always in motion, journeying together toward a deeper communion with God. It suggests that we are a Church that has not yet arrived, but rather is constantly moving forward, learning, and growing as we seek the fullness of life in Christ. The phrase reminds Jonathan that we are part of something bigger than ourselves. In his work as a parish musician and liturgist, this theme is practical, since he sees his role as walking alongside the community, helping to inspire a sense of movement and intentionality in worship. Jonathan says, "Music and liturgy have the great power of bringing people together, guiding the assembly on this shared path. Every Sunday, every Mass, every choir rehearsal feels like a step forward in this collective journey. The pilgrim Church isn't just about where we're headed; it's about who we're becoming along the way."



Lydia Maier

NPM Members' Scholarship

Lydia Maier is currently a sophomore at the University of Iowa, studying Organ Performance under Dr. Gregory Hand. Originally from Madison, Wisconsin, she began her studies in 2021 under Andrew Kreigh and continued with Bruce Bengtson in 2022. Lydia is passionate about the organ, but her love for music extends beyond performance, as she enjoys attending local concerts and recitals, and she is involved in music ministry. In addition to music, Lydia enjoys cooking and baking. She is also a member of both the National Association of Pastoral Musicians (NPM) and the American Guild of Organists (AGO). Lydia values the connections she has made within the music community and is dedicated to using her talents to inspire and uplift others.

Lydia first became involved in music ministry when she was younger, motivated by a desire to participate more fully in worship. While attending Mass, she realized how meaningful music was in creating an atmosphere that encouraged prayer and reflection. She wanted to go beyond participating and contribute her own musical abilities to enhance the worship experience. It is important to Lydia to use her passion in a way that can bring others closer to God, whether by leading them in song or by creating an environment that encourages prayer. Music ministry has become not just a way for her to grow as a musician, but also to deepen her faith.

Lydia became involved with NPM around the same time that she began learning organ. At the time, she was looking for different opportunities to grow in her understanding of liturgical music and to connect with others who shared her interests. NPM provided Lydia with an environment where she could expand her knowledge, learn from experienced pastoral musicians, and build a stronger sense of community.

Through NPM, she has been exposed to different ideas and approaches to music, which has not only improved her skills, but also given her a deeper appreciation for the connection between music and faith. Being a part of NPM has helped shape Lydia's perspective on what it means to serve as a pastoral musician and how music can bring people closer to God.

Lydia's favorite part about being a pastoral musician is the opportunity to help others connect with God on a deeper level through music. Lydia says, "Music has a way of reaching people's hearts and creating moments of reflection and joy that words alone often cannot provide. What I find especially meaningful is how music can bring an entire congregation together in shared worship." For Lydia, leading through music is both a privilege and a responsibility; it requires a focus on the needs of the community, as well as creating an environment that inspires. Lydia knows this can be challenging at times, but finds it rewarding to see how her influence can affect people and draw them closer to God. She finds this work both humbling and fulfilling; it allows her to serve others while also growing in her own faith.

For Lydia, the idea of "A Pilgrim Church" reflects the idea that our faith journey is ongoing and adaptable, recognizing that the Church is not restricted to a specific building, but is instead a living community. Lydia points out that worship and faith should fill every aspect of our lives, not just the moments we spend in a physical church building. On her own journey of faith, Lydia has been both challenged and inspired by music, which has been a constant source of purpose for her. However, there have been moments when it was difficult to stay encouraged, when doubts have entered her mind and she has wondered if she can truly make a difference or if the time and energy she invests is worth

it. During such moments of doubt, Lydia has found that turning to prayer and perseverance is key. When she commits to seeing things through, whether it's a challenging piece of music or difficulty being inspired through music ministry, it always proves to be worth it. The moments that had the most profound impact on her journey have been when she is discouraged and tempted to give up, but she is reminded by her faith to continue on. Music has taught Lydia that even

small contributions can have a meaningful impact, and being part of a "pilgrim church" means going forward with faith, even when the path ahead feels uncertain. It's through these experiences that she has come to view these challenges not as obstacles but as opportunities to grow in trust of the future that God has planned for her, and to deepen her connection with God and the community.



Hektor Pitstick

OCP Scholarship

Hektor Pitstick began to learn the piano at age three from his father, Rodrik Pitstick. Working through the tears and initially loathing the instrument, he was forced to continue into formal lessons until he graduated from high school. During his high school years, he began to fall in love with music, eventually becoming unsatisfied with the limitations of the piano and deciding to learn the organ as well. When he is not in the practice room, Hektor enjoys skiing, swimming, reading, traveling, and attending concerts.

Hektor's journey with liturgical music began when he was in high school. As soon as his band teacher found out he could play the piano, she started having him play for the school Mass every Thursday. At this time, Hektor was not able to sight-read easily, so he would toil for months on even the simplest of pieces; all of a sudden, he had to learn all new music every week. Hektor found the experience terrifying and new but grew to love the constant variety and thrill that liturgical music offered him. Within a year of these beginnings, Hektor was playing at every parish in his town, including the Cathedral. After taking some organ

lessons, he realized that he had discovered his vocation within his passion for music and the need for liturgical musicians, including organists.

Hektor first became involved with NPM in 2023 preparing for and leading up to the National Convention in Reno, when he assisted with the designing of the worship aids. His favorite part of being a pastoral musician is that he is able to exercise his vocation through his musical passion. He says, "It is a gift that I am able to spend my life doing what I love." For Hektor, this issue's theme of "A Pilgrim Church" speaks to the journey that individuals collectively pursue toward Christ and the spirit in which everyone must assist each other in their vocation. He states, "What is beautiful about liturgical music is that it is truly the vocation of everyone to sing to God, and the notion of a whole pilgrim Church calls on us as pastoral musicians to guide all to this vocation of praise."



Emerson Waisnor

GIA Scholarship

Emerson Waisnor is a resident of Burlington, Massachusetts and a student at Saint Anselm College. She has been involved in music ministry since third grade, when she joined the adult choir at her local parish. At the age of nine, she sang her first solo on Christmas, and at the age of thirteen, she served as cantor for the first time at a wedding. Now, she sings as a cantor and choir member in the Saint Anselm College Choir, and she is excited to be joining the music ministry at Saint Joseph Cathedral in Manchester, New Hampshire. Emerson also hosts open mic nights and performs in musical theater productions. When she isn't singing, she enjoys crocheting, baking, and spending time with her big family. Emerson is grateful for everyone who has supported her on her musical journey.

When Emerson was a toddler, her mother would have to redirect her attention at Mass, as she was always focused on the choir loft. When Emerson was eight years old, she saw in the bulletin that they were looking for choir members and begged her mom to let her join, despite it being an adult choir. After a few phone calls and emails, Emerson was able to sing with the choir every week, and although she had to stand on a milk crate to reach the microphones and special-order a robe that fit, she felt like her biggest dreams had come true. That choir became like family to her, and she soon started singing solos, followed by weddings and funerals a few years later, and eventually Sunday Masses.

Emerson first became involved with NPM in September of 2021, when she joined the music ministry as a cantor at St. Mary - St. Catherine of Siena Parish in Charlestown, Massachusetts, due to the encouragement of director John Volpe. Emerson's favorite part about being a pastoral musician is seeing the impact music has on a congregation. Whether it is a joyful Easter hymn, a nostalgic Christmas carol, or a piece that helped someone grieve a loved one, Emerson finds that music does impact those beyond music ministry, and she finds being a part of delivering that impact to be very beautiful.

To Emerson, "A Pilgrim Church" is one where God's people lift each other up throughout their journey to become closer to God. She says, "We not only share the goal of eternal life with God, but we help each other and work as a loving family within our faith." Emerson's involvement with music ministry greatly influenced her faith from a young age and made her truly prioritize going to Mass, providing her with a loving group of people to support her on her faith journey. Emerson continues, "Growing up serving God through music and having a place to feel welcomed and supported raised me to be enthusiastic about my faith and loving towards others."



Olivia Amting

Girardot Family Scholarship

Editor's note: Unfortunately, we were unable to reach Olivia before this edition went to print.

Olivia Amting is a native of Marshall, Michigan, and a first-generation undergraduate student at Aquinas College in Grand Rapids, studying Church Music on the piano and organ. She grew up homeschooled on a dairy farm and began her artistic journey at age five with piano and dance lessons. Later, Olivia started participating in musical theater and started her spiritual journey when her family began attending St. Mary's Catholic Church in Marshall with their friends.

She began music ministry in middle school when the music director at her church asked if she and her friend would serve as cantor together for Sunday Mass. Gradually, Olivia fell in love with her faith through music and came into the Catholic Church along with her family at the Easter Vigil in 2015. Ever since, she has felt a call to worship and to spread Christ's love to others through music. Olivia first became involved with NPM through Barbara McCarger, the music department chair at Aquinas College, who connected Olivia with scholarship and student membership opportunities.

We wish Olivia, Jonathan, Lydia, Hektor, and Emerson many blessings as they pursue continued growth in their ministry!

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A SONG FOR THE JOURNEY

How to Grow a Choir

By: *Michelle Rego*

Editor's note: This reflection is an excerpt from an e-book entitled "How to Grow a Choir," written by Michelle Rego, gratefully reprinted with the permission of the author.

"Singing is the sound of the soul."

—James Runcie

Every living creature has a singing voice. Birds sing across power wires, chirping in an unknown yet tuneful language, with not a care about what we think of their song. Sea creatures communicate in pitches that have mesmerized divers and scientists. Animals talk and sing in a myriad of patterns and styles, so that those of their own kind hear and understand.

And we humans? We use our speaking voices constantly, although not always well, in terms of civil discourse and respectful words. But we also possess a tool that does more than communicate...we can sing... and singing gives us a window to the one thing the rest of creation lacks—the soul.

People once sang naturally, to pass time, to entertain, sometimes to survive the worst of conditions. They also sang when speech was not enough—in the most joy-filled times, and the lowest of the low. Even more important, people learned about the power of song in community—in singing together bonds were formed as souls came out to greet each other. The power of group singing could be seen in churches, schools, and community and civic gatherings, as well as in war, oppression, and in the inspirational, both human and divine.

The concept of group singing is as important to our humanity as any other group endeavor available to us human beings. But too many people live with the lie that their voice is weak, off-key, loud, or too uncomfortable for others to hear. We live in an age when only the best singers are allowed to access the wonderful joy of singing out loud, and the natural simplicity of singing together has been replaced by the almighty video screen. Couple that fact with the downplaying of art and music-making in our schools, churches, and communities, and we find ourselves in the twenty-first century seeing and hearing fewer communal songs.

If you have read thus far, then you care about choirs and group singing. You might be a choir director, a current or formal choir member, an enthusiastic choir fan, or an avid in-the-shower-only singer. No matter your relation to choirs and their music, you simply recognize the purpose and importance of this medium. And you are finding it harder and harder to experience group songs anywhere, including all the places you used to hear that song.

This piece is dedicated to the planting, seeding, sowing, growing, and reaping the benefits of a choir, whether it is a school choir, a church choir, an impromptu choir from a forward-thinking company or business, or a community choir. Not only is it an art to make the choral sound, but it is also an art to create the "garden" where a choral sound can originate and bloom.

It is my hope that many of the suggestions and anecdotes provided here will give you the tools you need to create that garden, and to give back to other people the gift they've always had from the time they were born—the gift of song, and the gift of singing alongside others.

Cultivating the Soil: Promoting Singing as "Normal"

Any worthy farmer will tell you that if you expect to reap a good harvest, then you must first cultivate the soil. If you are in the business of developing a singing group of any kind, you must first prepare the soil that will be the foundation for the growth of this group. If you neglect this step, there is a great chance your endeavor will fail, due to improper or incomplete preparation. The soil we must cultivate as choir directors or group leaders is the concept of group singing as a norm, and not an anomaly.

That's a tall order in today's culture, where it is deemed by television and the recording industry that only the best of the best voices is worthy of expression. Many people were told, as children, that they were tone-deaf, or too loud, or too weak, or too inadequate a singer to be a part of the choir, and that the best thing to do when singing in school was to "mouth the words." This is an injustice that needs to be corrected in your arena before you even begin to think about group/choir music!

A SONG FOR THE JOURNEY



How can singing become “normal” in your situation? If you are a church musician or a school music teacher, it is easy. Singing is a part of worship, and singing should be a part of every child’s school day. Find reasons to sing as often as possible with everyone at any gathering, not just with those with musical talent. Think about events and activities that occur outside your normal space, as well. Birthdays, holidays, social events, club meetings, study groups, even business meetings can start with a song! The music you sing should be appropriate to the group and the occasion, of course, but there should be no reason that singing together should be an “odd” activity.

When you suggest a group song to a group not accustomed to singing, there will be resistance. Average people are not confident of their voices and will be afraid of their perceived vocal problems showing in front of others. You, as the leader, must start the song in a healthy, clear, and confident voice

that is pitched mid-range, so it is neither too high nor too low for anyone to join in. Keep your first few song experiences as simple and repetitive as possible.

For example, I have often taken a familiar Christmas carol and made up alternate lyrics to celebrate someone’s birthday or special occasion. Try this same idea with a familiar patriotic or folk tune, or even with a nursery rhyme tune. No one in your group needs to see actual music notes at this point, just lyrics, and if you really keep it simple, not even the lyrics, since you will be as repetitive as possible. Don’t rely on instrumental accompaniment either—it is best for all to hear their collective voices, so that they learn that this collective is right, good, and not unpleasant.

More than likely, someone will be off pitch in these situations. Let that be so for the moment. If the offending vocalist is singing a lower pitch, make a mental note of it, and look for something to sing next

“We can and should be sowers of song in all our spaces, both at work and at home. Those of us gifted with strong voices and/or trained musical ability should be on the forefront of this effort, tilling the soil with singing opportunities for everyone.”

time that leans a little lower. The same thing if someone errs on the higher pitched side. Or sing a second “verse” of your current song and pitch it differently, to see if that singer can hear and come closer to matching. You are cultivating acceptance, inclusivity, and more than one chance to blend many sounds into a unified sound. You are cultivating the soil.

Look for any opportunity for your group or organization to render a quick song. If you are part of a church, the opportunities exist not only within worship, but also at church picnics, committee or staff meetings, and educational gatherings. If you work at a primary school, it is more than easy to find times for children to sing together, and without any preparation on their part. Older kids become more self-conscious about their vocal abilities (you’ll find they are either divas or almost completely silent,) so you might have to get more creative in terms of engagement. Play a recording and have them sing along. Listen to sung music with them and invite their feedback. Make a call-and-response statement part of the opening and the closing of your class, and of your entire school day, like a school anthem or chant. Over time, your students will not want to skip this, as it binds them together as a team, or even a family.

In an office or corporate setting, singing can be introduced at company social events first, but with great sensitivity to the discomfort that will exist, especially in a setting where music is never expected. Conferences or large group meetings allow for less exposure to individual voices, so try the school chant approach or a very familiar song, such as a carol, patriotic song, or nursery rhyme that might be fitting for your setting. Staff retreats are opportunities for singing that are not to be missed, since the usual place for these gatherings is away from the corporate building, and things are more relaxed.

Whatever the setting, make sure you take time to evaluate how “foreign” singing currently is to that culture. If singing is already happening, or you know the setting is open for song, proceed in that mode, leading with confidence, and the expectation that all will join in. If singing is considered foolish, embarrassing, or a waste of time, then care must be taken to ease your folks into simple, repetitive, and short phrases or chants that will enable group cohesion and team enhancement.

Singing is normative in our society but forgotten in some arenas. We can and should be sowers of song in all our spaces, both at work and at home. Those of us gifted with strong voices and/or trained musical ability should be on the forefront of this effort, tilling the soil with singing opportunities for everyone.



Michelle Rego is a pastoral musician and the founder and CEO of VOCALEXCEL, a consulting company for all looking to discover and grow their own individual and collective voice. As a professional musician, clinician, and public speaker for the past 38 years, Michelle has offered in-person and online courses in public speaking, singing, executive presentation skills, leadership skills for artists and new managers, and various spiritual retreat experiences. She holds degrees from the University of Notre Dame and the University of Cincinnati and has taught all age levels, from children to senior citizens. Contact Michelle at vocalexcel@gmail.com.

FEEDING THE SPIRIT

Transformed by Black Sacred Song



By: Joseph A. Brown, SJ, PhD

“When you have a unit like that where 20 people get together and they have something called a church and maybe the missionary who baptized them was white and maybe they’re even still slaves, but they’re actually brought into an institution that says, ‘The power is in this circle,’ then you have something you can actually fashion in your own interest.”¹

—Bernice Johnson Reagon

The insight of Bernice Johnson Reagon with which we begin this reflection is a challenge to us, especially those of us who rely on selected and confirmed authorities to teach us and lead us in liturgical expression. Black worship is grounded in the cultural heritage brought to our world by those millions of enslaved Africans who, though separated from their land, were never separated from their cultural identity. No one can approach the body of music traditionally called “Negro Spirituals” (but which will, in this reflection be called “Black Sacred Song”), without learning how traditional African spirituality survived the horrific traumas of the transatlantic slave trade and became the primary method by which the traumatized enslaved liberated themselves, through appropriating Christian sacred writings, transforming the scriptural stories into testimonies of resistance, persistence, and transcendence.

With their culture bruised but intact, the transported learned, generation after generation, to resist despair by appropriating the elements of the culture of the enslavers that would help them resist that despair and nihilism. In countless stories, we learn that the Bible became an object of fascination and a source of an inherent power that could possibly heal the mind and the spirit of the captured. In traditional African cultures an *nkisi* is an object that possesses the power to protect the human soul and guard it against illness for whoever is sick and wishes to be healed. An *nkisi* is also a chosen companion, in whom all people find confidence. It is a hiding place for people’s souls to keep and compose in order to preserve life.

When they learned that the Bible contained stories of enslaved people who groaned and cried out for deliverance and that God heard their cry and intervened in their lives, these enslaved seekers knew

that that book was a true *nkisi*. It carried the power to heal. They searched the pages for the stories that would provide the strategies for the restoration of their hope. They carefully chose the heroes and prophets who could best be models for their faith. Oh, and what they found are gifts to all believers, all human beings who experience isolation, despair, confusion, trauma, marginalization, and fear. All human beings.

Appropriating scripture—or placing oneself in the narrative—is an overwhelming difference between Black Sacred Song composers and the composers of many of the songs performed in the Christian congregations with which we are most familiar. The central questions to be employed in understanding this music are: Who is speaking/singing the song? Is the scriptural reference consistent with the focus of the song? One of the songs that best illustrates this inquiry is “We Are Climbing Jacob’s Ladder.” In Genesis, after Jacob has escaped from his brother and his nephews and is running toward the protection of his uncle Laban, he falls asleep at what he would later name “Bethel.” While dreaming, Jacob sees a ladder stretch from the earth to heaven. The angels of God descend from heaven, bringing messages to humans and return to heaven with the responses they have received. The song does not say, “and angels brought us news from heaven.” It does not say, “and we dreamed as Jacob dreamed.” The song says, “We are climbing...” The singers of the song identify with the angelic messengers. This song illustrates the phenomenon of mystical union with the divine, with the ability to “meet God in the middle of the air” (the subject of several other songs in this tradition).

The singers have placed themselves in a biblical narrative that gives them unlimited power. The same is true of other songs, such as “Go Down, Moses,” “Swing Low, Sweet Chariot,” “I, John, Saw the Holy Number,” “Ezekiel Saw the Wheel,” and “Plenty Good Room (in My Father’s Kingdom).” As one studies song after song from this tradition, one sees that the Black singer-composers walked into the biblical narrative and announced their legitimacy and power—and their intimate relationship with God the Deliverer, Jesus the Healer, and the Holy Spirit, the bestower of every spiritual gift.

This perspective is reflected in the prophetic utterance that Servant of God Thea Bowman, FSPA, PhD, delivered to the assembled Catholic bishops in 1989:



... I come to my church fully functioning. I bring myself, my black self, all that I am, all that I have, all that I hope to become, I bring my whole history, my traditions, my experience, my culture, my African-American song and dance and gesture and movement and teaching and preaching and healing and responsibility as gift to the church... I bring a spirituality that is contemplative and biblical and holistic, bringing to religion a totality of minds and imagination, of memory, of feeling and passion and emotion and intensity, of faith that is embodied, incarnate praise... a spirituality that is communal, that tries to walk and talk and work and pray and play together...²

When Sister Thea says that she is bringing a “faith that is embodied, incarnate praise,” she is talking about how Black Sacred Song announces, in the flesh, the totality of the singers’ lives. *Embodyed, incarnate praise.* “Song and dance and gesture and movement...” Each

of the songs that come from this tradition will spark this awareness, this blending (and not separation) of mind and body. “The power is in the circle” of worshippers. There is no us and them, only us. And there is no passive observer—each person in the circle (in the assembly) is fully engaged in participating in the communal act of faith.

Another insight from Bernice Johnson Reagon adds an even more startling observation as to how Black Sacred Songs are the essence of liturgical practice:

Songs are a way to get to singing. The singing is what you’re aiming for and the singing is running this sound through your body. You cannot sing a song and not change your condition... Sound is a way to extend the territory you can affect, so people can walk into you way before they can get close to your body. And certainly the communal singing that people do together is a way of announcing that we’re here, that this is real.³

Singing “runs sound through” our bodies. And our bodies are transformed by the sound. We are changed. If the words and the music and the rhythms are working toward creating this grace-filled phenomenon, then we can say that “there’s a sweet, sweet spirit in this place... [and] Without a doubt we’ll know / that we have been revived / when we shall leave this place.”⁴

It cannot be stressed strongly enough that the most powerful songs in this tradition do, indeed, appropriate biblical stories in such a way as to reorganize the perspectives of many of the stories. And many of the songs are clear in telling the singers and listeners that the song is in itself the real focus of the performance. When the old song says that “Joshua fit the Battle of Jericho,” the theme is that when the outnumbered sojourners on the path of promise encounter a formidable and unassailable foe, their only recourse is to band together, walk in union, and make a joyful noise. Their rhythmic marching and their liberated singing and playing will vanquish the greatest threat to their existence.

This conviction regarding the power of communal singing is found all through the testimonies of Black freedom efforts, from the transported Angolans who marched across the bridge over the Stono river near Charleston, South Carolina, in 1739—marching, singing, drumming, on their path of self-liberation; through the narratives of such heroes as Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth and thousands of others who lived to tell the tale of “how they got over”; and in every example of Freedom Riders, the marchers and protesters, from the time of the Civil War to the Civil Rights movements and the Black Lives Matter movements of our own time and places.

Not every song from this tradition is a rousing call to shout for freedom and inner liberation. There are many, many others that fit all of the moments of good, effective liturgy. The gathering of the faithful. Reflections on the burdens and concerns we bring into the assembly. Meditations on Scripture. Responses to the preaching. The Preparation of the Gifts and the Table of Welcome. The meditation of being in communion with God and with one another. The commitment to carry what has been given to us into the world, to become gifts for all whom we encounter.

“Come by Here, My Lord.” “Come and Go with Me, to My Father’s House.” “Lead Me, Guide Me.” “Go in the Wilderness.” “We Have Come into This House.” “Let Us Break Bread Together.” “Amazing Grace.” “Precious Lord.” “Let Us Break Bread Together.” “The Storm Is Passing Over.” “Lord, Help Me to Hold Out.” “Standing in the Need of Prayer.” “Fix Me, Jesus.” “Hush, Hush, Somebody’s Calling My Name.” “Give Me a Clean Heart.” “Woke Up This Morning.” “Is Your All on the Altar?” “Keep Your Lamps Trimmed and Burning.” “I’ve Just Come from the Fountain.” “Go Tell It on the Mountain.” “Certainly Lord.”

The list provided here, above, can serve—if one were so inclined—as a meditation on the feelings we can experience in our communal prayer in liturgy. Simply reciting the titles of these songs could lead us to find other songs in this repertoire, that would awaken “Something Within”:

Preachers and teachers would make their appeal,
Fighting as soldiers on great battlefields;
When to their pleadings my poor heart did yield,
All I can say, there is something within.

Refrain:

Something within me that holdeth the reins,
Something within me that banishes pain;
Something within me I cannot explain,
All that I know there is something within.

Have you that something, that burning desire?
Have you that something, that never doth tire?
Oh, if you have it—that Heavenly Fire!
Then let the world know there is something within.
[Refrain]

I met God one morn', my soul feeling bad,
Heart heavy laden with a bowed down head.
He lifted my burden, made me so glad,
All that I know there is something within.⁵ [Refrain]

At the beginning of this reflection, the term *nkisi* was introduced: “In traditional African cultures an *nkisi* is an object that possesses the power to protect the human soul and guard it...” The argument put forth here is that the songs themselves have become objects, containing the power to heal and transform. By singing these songs as they were intended to be sung, the assembly uses this power to free the spirit, in each individual and among all those gathered.



*“We end where
we begin. The
‘performance’
of the liturgy is
transformational.
We are renewed,
restored. We are
Pentecostal people.”*

Our ancestors of blood and faith defined themselves as free, first in spirit; and perhaps, for some, never in a social reality. Nevertheless, by the appropriation of scripture these composers of Black Sacred Music redefined themselves and have passed down through the ages to us the ability to free ourselves. They knew what they were doing. They who were *referenced* became the *referees*. They who were the victims become the judges. In one of the most sophisticated songs—one that is often misused as a simple “children’s song”—it is evident that they felt themselves possessed by the voice of the only true “master” they would ever follow without fail:

I got shoes,
You got shoes,
All of God’s children got shoes!
When I get to Heaven gonna put on my shoes;
I’m gonna walk all over God’s Heaven,
Heaven, Heaven.
Everybody talkin’ ‘bout Heaven ain’t goin’ there,
Heaven, Heaven;

Gonna walk all over God's Heaven!
 I got a robe,
 You got a robe,
 All of God's children got a robe!
 When I get to Heaven gonna put on my robe;
 I'm gonna shout all over God's Heaven,
 Heaven, Heaven.
 Everybody talkin' 'bout Heaven ain't goin' there,
 Heaven, Heaven;
 Gonna shout all over God's Heaven!
 I got wings,
 You got wings,
 All of God's children got wings!
 When I get to Heaven gonna put on my wings;
 I'm gonna fly all over God's Heaven!
 Heaven, Heaven.
 Everybody talkin' 'bout Heaven ain't goin' there,
 Heaven, Heaven;
 Gonna fly all over God's Heaven!⁶

Everybody talking 'bout heaven ain't going there. The angel messenger's voice appears again. I know what my certain future holds. I have had a vision. I have been in mystical union, however briefly; and I have a blessed assurance of my ultimate goal and reward. And I have returned to speak in the voice of Jesus: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father in heaven" (Matthew 7:21).

The end of a liturgical gathering is the sending forth, to testify to what has been seen and heard, and what has been received, for one's personal benefit—and for the healing of the world. We end where we begin. The "performance" of the liturgy is transformational. We are renewed, restored. We are Pentecostal people. And we are certain: "This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine... Everywhere I go, I'm gonna let it shine... Jesus gave it to me, I'm gonna let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine."⁷ Everywhere.



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Endnotes:

- ¹ "The Songs Are Free," Bernice Johnson Reagon Interview with Bill Moyers, 1991. Transcript: <https://billmoyers.com/content/songs-free/>, accessed 11/7/24.
- ² Sr. Thea Bowman's Address to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, June 1989, <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/african-american/resources/upload/Transcript-Sr-Thea-Bowman-June-1989-Address.pdf>, accessed 11/7/24.
- ³ "The Songs Are Free," Bernice Johnson Reagon Interview with Bill Moyers, 1991. Transcript: <https://billmoyers.com/content/songs-free/>, accessed 11/7/24.
- ⁴ Lyrics from "Sweet, Sweet Spirit." Contributor: Doris Akers. Text: © 1990, Manna Music. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission via ONELICENSE.net, License # A-730124. All rights reserved.
- ⁵ Lyrics from "Something Within." Text: Lucie E. Campbell 1885-1963. Tune: 10 10 10 10, Lucie E. Campbell 1885-1963; arr. by James Abbington, b. 1960, © 2000, GIA Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission via ONELICENSE.net, License # A-730124. All rights reserved.
- ⁶ Lyrics from "I Got Shoes." Tune: © 1989 Heritage Music Press, a division of The Lorenz Corporation (Admin. by Music Services). Text: © 1989 Heritage Music Press, a division of The Lorenz Corporation (Admin. by Music Services). All rights reserved. Reprinted with permission via ONELICENSE.net, License # A-730124. All rights reserved.
- ⁷ Lyrics from "This Little Light of Mine." Traditional. Contributor: Stephen DeCesare. Tune: Public Domain. Text: Public Domain.

Selected Resources:

African American Heritage Hymnal: 575 Hymns, Spirituals, and Gospel Songs. Rev. Dr. Delores Carpenter (Editor), Rev. Nolan E Williams Jr. (Editor). GIA Publications, Inc.

Lead Me Guide Me the African American Catholic Hymnal. Second Edition, Robert J. Batastini (Executive editor). GIA Publications, Inc.

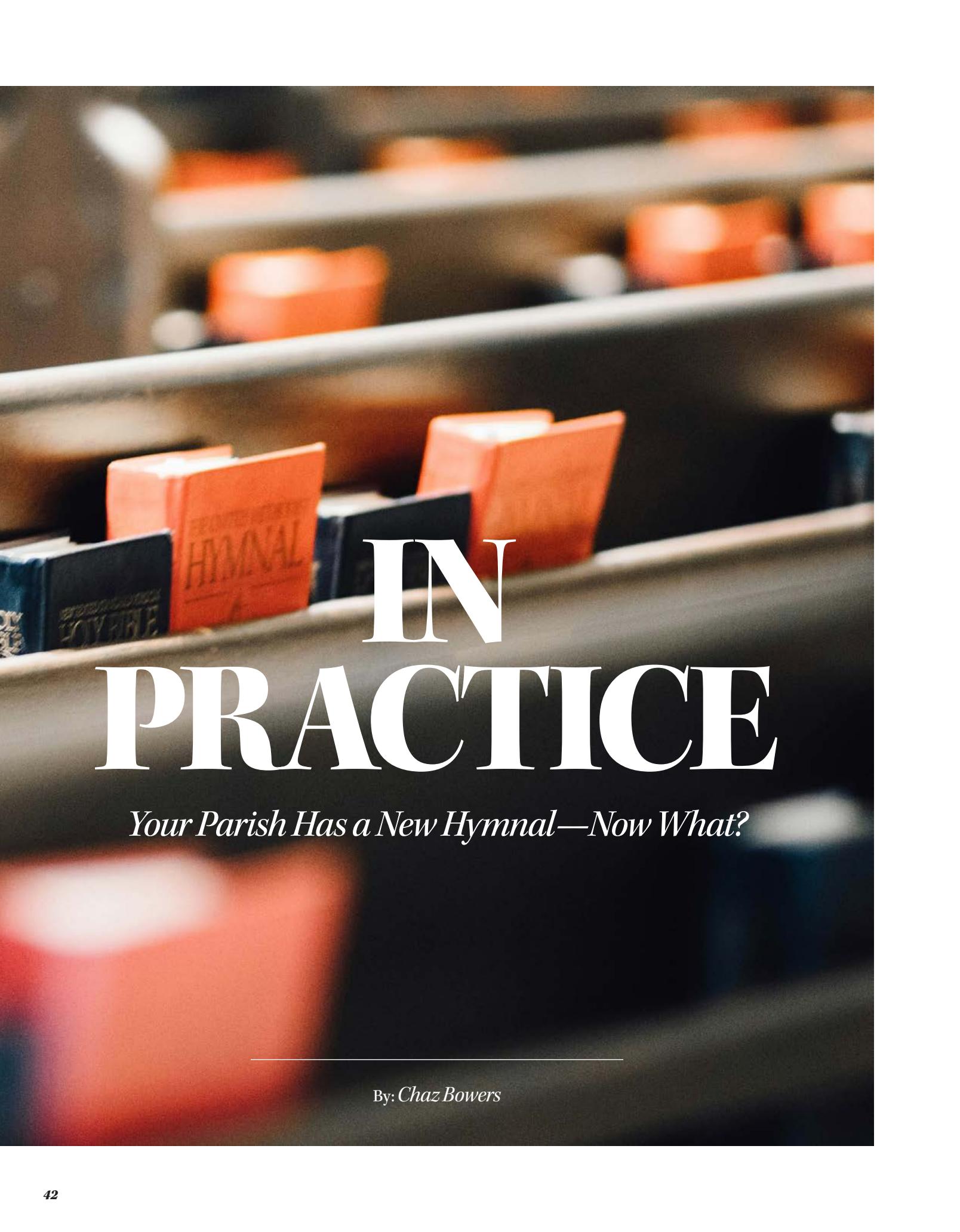
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Sister Thea Bowman Shooting Star, containing selected writings and speeches by Sister Thea (1937-1990). Edited by Celestine Cepress, FSPA, Ph.D. Foreword by Mike Wallace. St. Mary's Press, 1993.

Sister Thea Bowman's Address to the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, June 1989. <https://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/cultural-diversity/african-american/resources/upload/Transcript-Sr-Thea-Bowman-June-1989-Address.pdf>, accessed 11/7/24.

"The Songs Are Free." Bernice Johnson Reagon Interview with Bill Moyers, 1991. Transcript: <https://billmoyers.com/content/songs-free/>, accessed 11/7/24.



IN PRACTICE

Your Parish Has a New Hymnal—Now What?

By: *Chaz Bowers*

I asked myself this same question just a few years ago, when a parish merger led me to acquire nearly two thousand new hymnals to be used at both locations of the newly merged parish—St. Michael the Archangel Parish in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—where I serve as the director of music. Granted, there were several questions that came before this one, such as: “Will new hymnals be helpful to us at this point?” and “How might we pay for new hymnals?” and “Which hymnal should we buy?”

But I think the question of what you do with new hymnals once you have them is an important one because we as church musicians often do not have the time to be intentional and strategic when it comes to the business side of running a music ministry.

Getting a new hymnal—or any sort of congregational resource—is a great time to envision and imagine new possibilities for your congregation, while also promoting your ministry and the faith. It is a time to brainstorm with your pastor, parishioners, and fellow musicians about some of the things that you might do to further the faith through music.

As you begin having those conversations, here are just a few ideas to get you started:

Institute a hymnal campaign

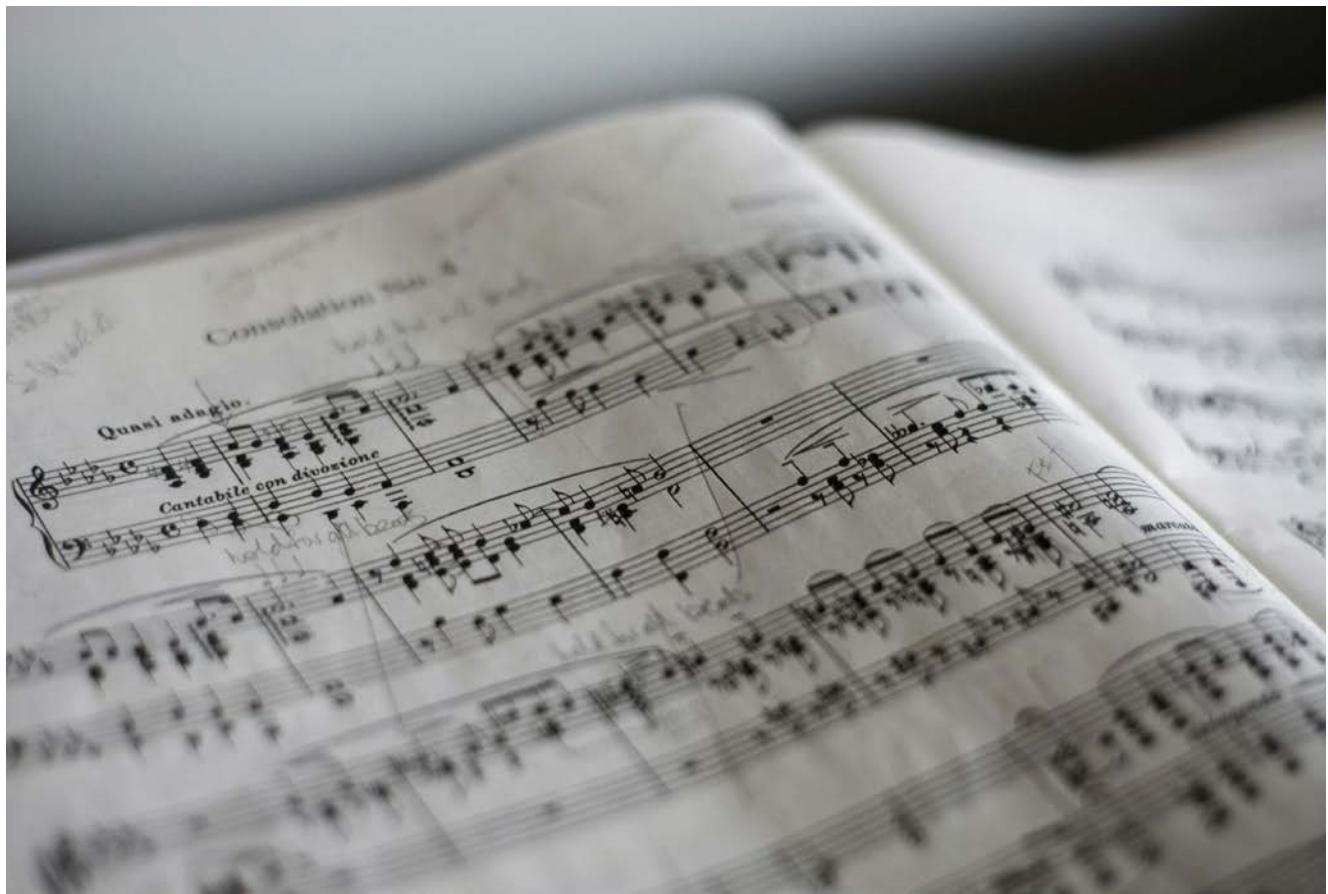
An excellent way to get buy-in from your parishioners—while also helping to offset the cost of the books—is to sell name plates for the front of your hardcover hymnals. We purchased hardcover hymnals (*Worship IV* from GIA Publications) for both of our churches. Both locations participated in the hymnal campaign, and we wound up raising enough money to completely cover the cost of the hymnals, while also getting people excited about the acquisitions. Setting up the campaign was uncomplicated—we had order forms distributed in the bulletins and made announcements at each Mass. Then we simply made sure to install the nameplates when the new hymnals arrived.

We had many parishioners and choir members purchase hymnals for their own use. Others purchased their hymnal in honor of a loved one or deceased loved one. Then there was the case of “Mary” (we’ll call her that for the purposes of this story). We phoned Mary and asked her for the names to be imprinted in the hymnals she had ordered. After she rattled off a few, we said “Okay, Mary, but we still need thirty-five more names!” She didn’t know that her husband had purchased forty hymnals for her as a joke. Regardless of his motive, it helped us to reach our goal!

Take time to familiarize yourself with your newest resource

This may seem obvious. However, it is easy to dive right into using a hymnal rather than working your way through it and familiarizing yourself with all of its elements. When getting to know a hymnal, it’s best to station yourself either at a computer (so that you can search the tunes with which you are unfamiliar) or an organ or piano. Check out all those rituals and the new service music, and the psalm and Mass settings—but also spend some time in the hymnal indexes. Hymnal indexes are an incredible resource that is often totally overlooked. They provide a means for tune swapping (putting a new text to a familiar tune) and for finding texts for specific solemnities, feasts, and other occasions.

We church musicians often take for granted the tedious process a publisher goes through in selecting hymns and service music—both ancient and modern—to be placed in a hymnal. Publishers strive to create a pew resource with the highest quality modern Christian texts, but they also select from the treasury of sacred music—Gregorian chants, Office hymns translated from Latin, modern compositions, and so on. Getting to know the indexes helps put you in touch with all that a hymnal has to offer.



“Highlighting a hymn on a weekly or monthly basis in the bulletin or on social media is an excellent way to familiarize your congregation with both new and old hymnody.”

Publish “Music Notes” in your bulletin or worship aid

I taught several years of hymnody at the college level, using our hymnal as a side-by-side resource with a text book. One of the points about hymnody that I always emphasized for my students is the idea that the hymnal may be considered the second most important book in teaching the faith (the Bible being the first). While that might be up for debate, consider how “The First Nowell” teaches the Christmas narrative or “Holy, Holy, Holy” teaches the concept of the Holy Trinity.

As such, publishing a couple lines of text in a bulletin or worship aid and giving additional background information on a hymn or a text can only help increase parishioners’ understanding of and appreciation for the music and liturgy. You might also consider publishing bulletin inserts explaining the theology tying the music used at Mass to the readings and propers of the day.

But you don't need to come up with these notes yourself. Erik Routley's *A Panorama of Christian Hymnody* is an excellent reference. GIA's companion resource to Worship III is another one that I treasure and often reference, as it provides background to the hymns (text), tunes (music), lyricists, composers, and arrangers in the hymnal. Similar resources may be found for other hymnals.

Select a “Hymn of the Week (or Month)”

Highlighting a hymn on a weekly or monthly basis—to be published in bulletins, on social media, in email blasts, and more—is an excellent way to familiarize your congregation with both new and old hymnody. This campaign can take many forms. For example, you might publish trivia questions on the selected text, tune, or composer. You might also choose to post applicable video recordings, either featuring your parish ensemble or pulling from the wealth of videos on YouTube.

You can also be creative in your choosing. For October, the month of the Rosary, you might choose a Marian hymn. For November, a month of remembrance, you could choose a funeral hymn or a hymn dedicated to the saints. More secular themes can also be included. For example, November has Thanksgiving, February is Black History Month (a month you can celebrate hymn contributions of Black composers), and March is Women's History Month (perhaps highlight music of women composers).

But you don't have to do all this research yourself. Consider delegating the Hymn of the Week to a choir member or congregant who enjoys history or hymnody.

Plan a hymn festival

As an organist, one of my favorite things to do is play hymns with an assembly. There is something thrilling about leading congregational songs from the organ console. A couple years ago at a parish near mine, the music ministry organized a benefit concert at which musicians and congregants sang a majority of the hymnal. But not every parish needs to go that far—a hymn-sing of about one hour, featuring popular old hymns and new ones, is a good way to get people excited about the new books.

Hymn festivals often include a blend of readings and hymns. Sometimes the only leader is an organist, and other times a parish may feature its ensembles or instrumentalists. Hymn festivals are often based on a topic (All Saints, Marian hymns, Easter hymns, or even more ethereal topics such as peace, creation, and light). Be sure to incorporate hymns from a wide variety of traditions so that there is something for everyone—from familiar to new hymns and from ancient Gregorian chants to modern compositions.

Have your new hymnals blessed

Chapter 39 of the *Book of Blessings* includes a section called, “Order for the Blessing of Articles for Liturgical Use,” which includes hymnals. Your hymnals should be blessed before use, but you may choose to make an event of it—either as part of your hymn festival or at another appropriate time. The blessing can be performed by either a priest or a deacon. Just remember that, once blessed, hymnals should not be discarded, but properly disposed of (destroyed or burned and buried) as with any other sacramentals.

Meet the congregation where they are

It is important to remember that change can be hard for many people. In fact, parishioners reacting negatively to new music is such a common occurrence that it has inspired a slew of Internet memes—many of which I'm sure you've seen.

When first using a new hymnal, try to avoid planning too many new pieces for Mass and other liturgies. A Mass with too much new music can become a sight-reading exam, discouraging participation. I personally try to program new music near the middle of the Mass, allowing it to be bookended by familiar pieces. After I do this, I try not to wait too long before programming the new hymn again—to help familiarize people with it while it is still fresh on their minds.

A great catalyst for learning new material is to incorporate it seasonally. For instance, a new Communion hymn could be taught and sung weekly during the Bread of Life discourse in Year B, or a new style of psalmody could be used in Advent. Each of these instances allows for repeated but not overwhelming exposure to new material.



“Playing a prelude on a new Entrance or Offertory hymn is a great way to get a tune in your parishioners’ ears without them knowing it.”

Use your choir to your advantage

Generally, my choir sings in unison on the outer stanzas of a hymn (the first and last) and in parts on the inner stanzas. This method allows them to assist the assembly in managing the tune on the first stanza and for the organist to reharmonize on the last stanza. When you follow this method, you really dress up a hymn, almost creating a simple choral anthem—and it can be enhanced by a descant on the final stanza.

Unlike the assembly, most choirs have regular rehearsals, so their preparation can greatly assist in making a new hymnal successful. Just having them for reinforcement on a new tune the first time it is programmed can make a big difference. As you proceed onward, consider a concertato setting of a hymn with the assembly (maybe even throw in some brass and timpani), or have the choir sing an anthem setting of a new hymn before you use it with a congregation.

Use hymn-based keyboard and instrumental repertoire

Playing a prelude on a new Entrance or Offertory hymn is a great way to get a tune in your parishioners' ears without them knowing it. Organists and other keyboard players who improvise can skillfully weave a new tune into their improvisations in the same way. Don't miss the opportunity to include notes on hymn-based preludes if you're choosing to provide music notes in your bulletin or worship aid, as mentioned above.

Use your worship aid to supplement the hymnal

A trend that grew in popularity during the pandemic was the use of worship aids instead of hymnals, as they are disposable and cheap in the short term. However, the cumulative cost of printing worship aids over time can far exceed the money spent on the acquisition of hymnals—which can last many years, if well-maintained.

At my parish, we use hymnals as well as worship aids, with the latter supplementing the former. It is nice for hymnals to remain in the pews, not only for times when it is not feasible or possible to print worship aids, but also to give access to texts of the Mass and various prayers and hymns often found in hymnals. Because our hardcover hymnals were donated in memory of deceased loved ones, we were able to use those funds toward the printing and licensing of worship aids.

If you employ worship aids or print the music for Sunday Mass in your bulletin, don't forget to publish the numbers for the Order of Mass and the readings of the day alongside the music, as applicable, and be sure to follow all necessary licensing and reporting regulations. For churches that cannot print all of the music sung in the Mass in a worship aid, consider at least listing the Mass ordinary/service music by hymnal number, so that parishioners are given all the tools they need to participate. Hymn numbers should also be provided if you don't have the space or budget to print the music along with the text—many people feel closest to God when singing, and if they have a musical background, it

can discourage them from participating if they are only given text. We print these reference numbers in my parish's worship aids, and I have been thanked for it on several occasions—usually by guests to our parish who are not used to having the music provided to them.

Getting rid of your old hymnals

Hardcover resources are able to serve a parish for a long time, but when that time runs out, you may want to seek out a new home for your hymnals before simply recycling them. (Remember, if they have been blessed, dispose of them properly.) Another parish, monastery, abbey, or retreat center may be interested in using your old hymnals to replace some of their worn and tattered ones. I always keep a few choir hymnals for organ students and save a few accompaniment books for future reference.

What's in a book?

So much! Hymnals teach the faith and they enable the participation of the assembly in the Mass. In an age of printed and disposable resources, don't take for granted the beauty of a hardcover resource that will last for many years.

Happy hymning!



Chaz Bowers is the director of music at St. Michael the Archangel Parish in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and former adjunct professor of sacred music at Seton Hill University in Greensburg, Pennsylvania. He is a published composer of church music and a past dean of the Pittsburgh chapter of the American Guild of Organists. Chaz holds a Master's degree in sacred music from Duquesne University and a Bachelor's degree in sacred music from Seton Hill University.

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

Transitions

By: *Robert Batastini*

Editor's note: This article is reprinted with permission and was originally published in GIA Quarterly 13.4, Summer 2002.

In just another month I will retire from the active pastoral music ministry for the second (and final!) time. [Editor's note: *To the surprise of no one who knows him, Bob still has an active role in music ministry at his parish church.*] A wonderful pastoral musician has been contracted to take over the role of music director in my parish, and I will resume that noble-sounding position—one without responsibilities, recompense, rewards, or regrets—music director emeritus. In my forty-seven years as a pastoral musician, I've spent most of my time in just three parishes. I did double duty for a couple of years, and one short-term stint of nine months after the death of the music director while that parish was in search of a new director. All in all, however, transitioning from job to job, or parish to parish, is something with which I do not have a lot of experience.

My longest term was twenty-three wonderful years spent at St. Barbara Parish in Brookfield, Illinois. After such a lengthy tenure, starting anew at my present parish back in 1991 turned out to be quite a challenge. Today, I am in the midst of doing my share to provide for a smooth transition to my successor and looking back on a long career, and I thought it might be worth devoting a brief column to some thoughts on the subject.

My successor has been asking what I consider to be all the right questions, and on my end, I am trying to give him as much information about the established music ministry as possible. It is clear, however, that this does not always happen. We have witnessed far too many transitions that have resulted in an unhappy ending. A new music director steps into a parish with a thriving music ministry, and by the end of the first season half of the choir members have quit. Regardless of who or what is at fault, it is the parish community that suffers.

So below are a few random thoughts about such transitions. All developed from practical experience—some because I made the right choice, and some learned from making mistakes. I'll begin by addressing the outgoing musician.

Regardless of your reason for leaving a position, such transitions are all about people—the people of the parish community. As sometimes happens to the children of divorced parents, the community suffers when pastor and musician separate on less-than-amicable terms. Care about the community even if you feel that the pastor treated you poorly or unfairly. He'll move on in due time, but the community of faith remains. What you leave behind by way of the legacy of your music ministry speaks about you and no one else.

Put the place in order. File away all the choral music, and perhaps label each title with the last date performed or which choir sings it. Put the instrumental parts where they can be found. Mark up a copy of your hymnal or worship aid indicating which hymns and songs the assembly knows well, which ones they've sung in the past but probably need some review, and what service music is part of the parish repertoire. If you have used certain settings in certain seasons, indicate this, too. Put the worksheets for all past liturgies in order so that the new musician will be able to determine what music was sung on Holy Thursday or the Eleventh Sunday in Ordinary Time last year.

Spend some time preparing an overview of the program as it has functioned under your direction. Describe each choir: when they rehearse and sing, what time they are expected to arrive, when the season begins and ends, how it has functioned on special occasions such as Christmas and the Triduum. Include starting and ending times for rehearsals, whether or not a break has customarily been taken, whether or not refreshments are served during the break. Don't be afraid to talk about the problems, too, but try not to pass on any personal prejudices.

Explain the customary cantor routine. Talk about musical-liturgical practices such as how different weekday Masses are treated musically, how the responsorial psalm is handled (e.g., psalm of the day or seasonal psalm), what the custom is regarding the number of hymn stanzas commonly sung, how many readings are usually included in the Easter Vigil, and whether or not prelude and postludes are customary, to name just some of the more obvious items.

Provide an up-to-date list of the choir members, instrumentalists, and cantors with addresses, phone numbers, and email addresses. Include a list of all former members of the music ministry, just for the record. Provide the names and phone numbers of extra

LOOKING BACK, LOOKING FORWARD

musicians you have hired for special events. Give your successor the phone number of the piano tuner and organ service company.

Label all keys, and leave instructions on such things as how to turn on the heat for weeknight choir rehearsals in the winter months, how to unjam the photocopier, how to find certain files on the computer (and be sure to copy any pertinent files you may have on your home computer onto the computer in the music office), how to program the voicemail, where to find the coffee pot, and whatever else is necessary to help for a smooth adjustment period.

If the transition occurs at a time of year when the choirs are either still in season or can be assembled for the occasion, consider celebrating with a liturgy. The outgoing director (who has, of course, prepared all the music) will conduct the choirs for the last time, but the new person should perhaps conduct part of the service. The pastor can recognize the contribution of the outgoing director and introduce the new person, creating a genuine sense of continuity.

A great danger in a transition of this type occurs when the new musician arrives behaving like a crusader who has come to transform the music program. Remember that no matter what the existing program is like, it is what people know and what they have presumably been comfortable with. The better you are, the more you may threaten the security of the least confident musicians in the ministry. Many a veteran member of a parish music ministry has quit because he or she felt threatened by the new director. The key is for the new director to appear on the scene hardly noticed—musically, that is. Slip into the parish routine as it has been. You may play the piano or organ better than your predecessor—that's terrific—but for a while, play the same songs in the same key at the same tempo. Ask the cantors. They'll be more than glad to tell you "how we've always done it." Meet the parish where it is before you try to take it to someplace new. If things have been wonderful, perhaps you merely need to be one who sustains this. Start the new choir season by singing a lot of what is already in their repertoire, then slip in an attractive new (easy) piece with which you can gain quick and gratifying results. Get to know and love the folks before you try to get them to do what they have never before experienced.

Lastly, as for the parish community itself, and especially the members of the music ministry, throw a party! Greet the new musician with a celebration of people, food, and drink. If the transition occurs during the summer, make it a picnic: plenty of food, and beverages, perhaps live music, at a gathering of all the singers, instrumentalists, and parish staff with their families. Invite former members of the music ministry to attend, including the former director if possible. Wear name tags, drink a toast, and celebrate the fact that music is alive and well and thriving in your parish community. In this way, members of the music ministry remind each other that they are the music ministry of the parish, which is simply undergoing a leadership change.

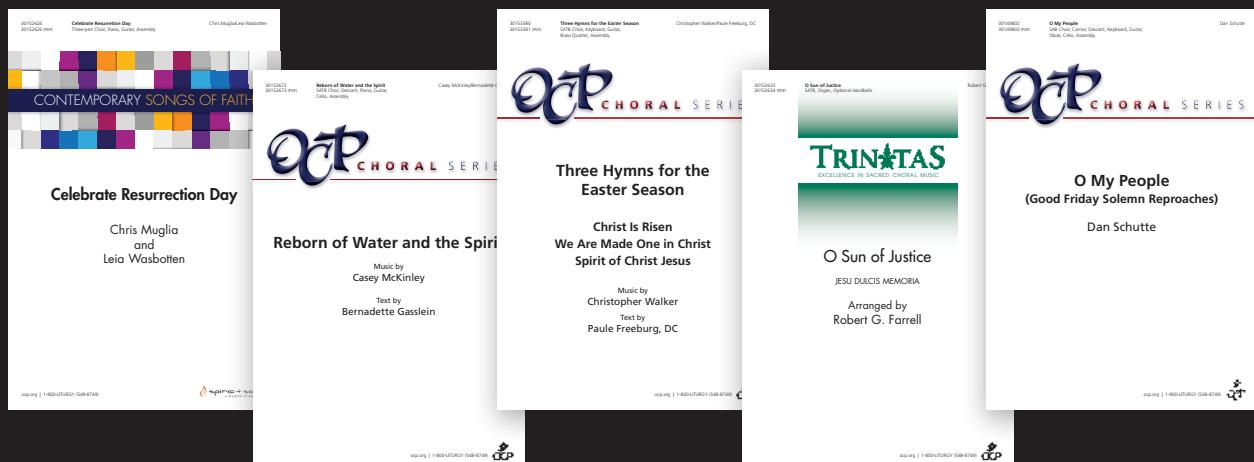


Robert J. Batastini became the organist in his Catholic parish as a high school freshman, and for four years of high school and all of college, he began each day at 6:30am playing two morning Masses. He continued to serve successive parishes as music director and/or choir director for an unbroken career of sixty-eight years and, to this day, sings in his parish choir and occasionally accompanies or directs. In 1967 he began a forty-year term as vice president and senior editor of GIA Publications, directing twenty-five hymnal projects—including the Worship and Gather hymnal series, Total Praise, the hymnal of the National Baptist Convention USA, and two bilingual English/Spanish hymnals. Robert brought the music of Taizé to America. He is a past president and fellow of the Hymn Society in the United States and Canada and served two terms as director of the Grand Rapids NPM Chapter. Currently he is the music director for Christians Uniting in Song and Prayer (CUSP), an ecumenical choir made up of fifty-five singers drawn from twenty local churches. Upon retiring from GIA, Robert and his wife, Doreen, relocated to Southwestern Michigan.

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REVIEWS OF CONTEMPORARY CHORAL MUSIC

by *Brian Bisisig*

Deus Caritas Est

Bob Moore. Three-Part Equal Voices, and Piano. GIA Choral Series, GIA Publications, Inc. G-10211.

This lovely choral piece combines the Latin phrase meaning “God is love” with the familiar Scripture verse John 3:16, “God so loved the world...” The result is a moving reflection on God’s love for us, especially in the Incarnation. It is well suited for a men’s or women’s choir, although the composer notes the piece works with mixed voices, too. The subtle and unexpected harmonic changes add wonderful interest and color to this piece but would not be difficult for singers to learn, and the gentle piano part wonderfully complements the reflective nature of the piece.

Behold What You See

Bernard Sexton. SATB Choir, Cantor and Assembly, Keyboard, Guitar, and C Instrument. GIA Celebration Series, GIA Publications, Inc. G-10690.

The memorable refrain of this piece, based on text attributed to St. Augustine, was originally conceived as an ostinato to be sung during the Communion procession. Assemblies and choirs will easily be able to sing this refrain from memory, even in harmony, as they process. Verses drawn from Psalm 34 are included as well. Guitarists will appreciate the interesting but not difficult chord progression, and choirs will enjoy the satisfying harmonies.

Maria, Regina Pacis

Christian Cosas. SAB Choir, Cantor, Assembly, Keyboard, Guitar, Flute, Brass Quartet, and 3-Octave Handbells. GIA Celebration Series, GIA Publications, Inc. G-10454.

This litany to Mary, Queen of Peace, is strikingly beautiful. Upon a first listen, I was immediately captivated by the prayerful longing evoked by the melodic suspensions in the melody. The subtle change from D minor to F major within the refrain is simple but so effective, as is the leap of a 7th on the words, “*Ora pro nobis.*” The text incorporates scriptural references to Mary’s life while praying for those who suffer today: those in exile, those who anguish, those who are exploited. Furthermore, the composer gives us eight different languages that could be used for the refrain. The piece begins simply but increases in volume and fullness until a surprising key change at the bridge. The parts for handbells and brass quartet are not complex and would add to the majesty of this piece.

“This is a marvelous way to help our assemblies explicitly pray for various intentions through the intercession of the saints.”

Holy Spirit, We're Calling You

Ed Bolduc. SATB Choir, Assembly, Keyboard, and Guitar. GIA Voices Series, GIA Publications, Inc. G-10312.

This is a wonderful contemporary-style hymn to the Holy Spirit. The music has an uplifting feel that brings a sense of hope as we call upon the Spirit to “move within us.” The verses could easily be sung by different soloists or sections of the choir, and assemblies will quickly pick up the refrain with its accessible lyrics. The bridge of the song is especially nice and sets up the last verse perfectly.

All You Holy Men and Women

Sarah Hart and Francesca LaRosa. SATB Choir, Cantor, Assembly, Piano, Guitar. OCP Choral Series, OCP 30151323.

Here is a remarkable new twist on the Litany of the Saints. Saints are invoked with the response “Pray for us,” but they are grouped according to specific needs which could be notated in a worship aid. Needs such as illness, peace, infertility, parenting, vocations, the arts and artisans, the environment, and many more are included with the saints associated with those causes. Although this song wouldn’t replace the Litany of the Saints in its ritual setting, this is a marvelous way to help our assemblies explicitly pray for various intentions through the intercession of the saints.

O Lord, Hear My Prayer

Robert G. Farrell. SATB Choir, Organ, Optional Handbells. OCP Trinitas Series, OCP 30150490.

This choral piece has a beautiful, haunting quality as it draws upon a couple verses from the Psalms and asks the Lord to hear our prayer. The sparse use of handbells is simple and effective and is easily played by a choir member or two. The organ is also used sparingly, with much of the piece being sung *a cappella*. The choral parts are of medium difficulty, and you would want to rehearse them well because of some dissonant sonorities and in order to better be able to evoke the prayer. This piece would work well as a prelude, as it calls the listeners to enter more deeply into conversation with God.

The Wisdom of God

Heath Morber. SATB Choir. OCP Trinitas Series, OCP 30150478.

There is quite a depth of meaning in this choral piece for Holy Thursday. With a text taken from the Orthodox Church from Holy Thursday Matins, this piece will give your choristers and assemblies a chance to reflect on the humility of Jesus, “in whose hands is the life of all things,” yet who “kneels down to wash the feet of His servants.” This rather brief a cappella setting will give choirs a challenge, but one they can attain and be rewarded with the results. Unmetered chant with a drone in the bass creates a timeless and ethereal sound fitting for the solemn nature of the occasion.

Belovèd, Sleep Well

Music by Steven C. Warner and Text by Alan J. Hommerding. Solo, SATB Choir, Piano or Harp, Guitar. OCP Choral Series, OCP 30150971.

Written as an epilogue to a setting of the Passion of St. John, this piece is a song of mourning, with the soloist singing directly to the newly deceased Christ, and would be appropriate on Good Friday. An ancient Irish word/sound, “*Ochón*,” used by women mourners long ago in Ireland, is employed here to great effect. The somber Celtic sound of the music combined with this text is intriguing and would surely captivate listeners. The choral parts are not difficult, but a well-chosen soloist is a must for this engaging piece.



Brian Bisig is the Director of Music at St. Michael the Archangel Catholic Church in Cincinnati, Ohio. He has served in various worship and music roles in the Archdiocese of Cincinnati.

FROM THE BOARD

NPM Hopes and Dreams

A blessed new year to all! This issue's theme, "A Pilgrim Church," evokes the 2025 Jubilee Year "Pilgrims of Hope," which reminds me of St. Paul's letter to the Romans, encouraging us to "rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, and persevere in prayer" (Romans 12:12). It's no secret that NPM has been facing challenges in achieving financial stability for quite some time now. It has been hard to fully live out our mission and provide the content that we would like to because of it. It would be easy to simply throw in the towel. But frankly, this organization means so much to so many that we continue to "rejoice in [the] hope" that we will pull through these hard times and NPM will thrive again with God's help and the help of our many devoted, generous, and talented members. When we anchor our hope in God, it goes far beyond wishful thinking. This hope isn't rooted in something but rather in Someone. I'm convinced that, with God's help and the membership working together diligently and cooperatively, we can bring NPM to a much brighter place.

We can restore hope to our beloved organization, casting our nets wide and deep, making sure that all feel welcome, included, and seen. We have much work to do, and the Board does not take this lightly. Our Board of Directors has been hard at work, meeting twice a month and sometimes more often. We have been exploring new, innovative strategies to enhance our financial standing and improve our overall health as an association. Achieving these goals will require the collaboration and support of all our members. New things are on the horizon, including NPM On The Road and our 50th anniversary celebration.

In this Jubilee Year, my hope is that the wisdom and talents of our member leaders will continue to help foster the growth of our organization, increasing our

"The passion is strong for NPM to continue to be an influential force in Catholic music in the United States and abroad."

membership and enabling the mentoring and ongoing formation of current and future music ministers—from choirs to cantors, organists to ensembles, composers to directors, and all who believe in the power of a beautifully sung liturgy. It is essential that each member reach out to liturgical musicians who don't know of NPM and tell them of our value. Chapters can also play a vital role in this effort. It is my hope that, once we get back on our feet financially, we will enhance member benefits and use social media and technology even more effectively to better serve our members.

The passion is strong for NPM to continue to be an influential force in Catholic music in the United States and abroad. Please continue to pray for NPM, and be reminded that we are "pilgrims of hope," hoping for a bright future.



Anna Betancourt
Vice Chair, NPM Board of Directors

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ON THE ROAD

Join NPM as we go “on the road” in 2025! In lieu of one national convention, NPM will host regional events across the United States in the summer of 2025. The series, titled “NPM On The Road,” will be a 2-day event that includes a Keynote address, a concert, multiple workshop options, prayer opportunities, a choral reading session, networking opportunities, and much more.

Locations

June 17-18, 2025:

Chicago, Illinois
(Our Lady of Mount Carmel and Saint Clement Churches)

June 27-28, 2025:

San Antonio, Texas
(The University of the Incarnate Word)

July 7-8, 2025:

Atlanta, Georgia
(Immaculate Heart of Mary Church)

July 24-25, 2025:

Oakland, California
(Saint Raymond Catholic Church)

July 31-August 1, 2025:

Portland, Oregon
(University of Portland)

August 6-7, 2025:

Philadelphia,
Pennsylvania
(Rosemont College)

Sample Schedule

(This schedule is subject to change based on the logistical considerations of the city.)

Day 1:

3:00 pm: Registration and reception
4:15 pm: Welcome
4:30 pm: Keynote (pt. 1)
5:45 pm: Evening Prayer
6:30 pm: Concert followed by reception

Day 2:

8:00 am: Morning Prayer
8:30 am: Breakfast
9:00 am: Welcome
9:15 am: Keynote (pt. 2)
10:15 am: Break
10:30 am: Workshops
12:00 pm: Lunch
1:00 pm: Choral Reading Session
2:30 pm: Workshops
4:00 pm: Closing Mass with Recommitment/Blessing



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT NPM ON THE ROAD

Who are the On The Road events best suited for?

NPM On The Road is designed for many levels of musical skill and involvement, from the Director of Music to the choir member. Moreover, they are especially created for those without either the budget or the time to attend a national convention.

Can my parish musicians (who are currently not NPM members) attend NPM On The Road?

Absolutely! We worked to make this event as affordable as possible, both in cost and duration. Registration for non-members starts at \$125, making it an economical way for local pastoral musicians to attend an NPM event. The non-member rate also includes a 6-month membership to NPM.

I'd like to drive to an NPM On The Road event but I live a considerable distance away. Will there be hotel accommodations available?

NPM will provide hotel recommendations, but unlike national conventions, NPM will not be holding room blocks at these hotels. Therefore, rates may vary depending on the hotel's discretion, so it would be best to book early.

Will there be an exhibit hall?

Each location will have local and national exhibitors ready to network and offer suggestions for your parish ministry. There will also be time built into the schedule to meet with exhibitors.

KEYNOTES AND WORKSHOPS

The overall theme of NPM On The Road centers around the Jubilee Year of Hope that will be celebrated by the Church in 2025. However, each city will still have different Keynote speakers, workshop topics, and presenters. The Keynote addresses will be offered in two parts across the event, and each city will offer four different workshops, all of which will be offered twice.

PRICING

The following will be the registration fee for each city, per person. Additional costs for meals and add-ons may apply depending on the city; visit npm.org for more details.

Early Bird Pricing (through April 2, 2025)

NPM members: \$100
Non-members: \$125*

Regular Pricing (after April 2, 2025)

NPM members: \$125
Non-members: \$150*

The first 40 registrants in each city will receive a free gift!

*includes a 6-month Select-level NPM membership from the date of the event

Registration

Registration for NPM On The Road opens on **February 10, 2025**. Both online registration and a printable registration form will be available at that time.

THE “EXTRA BEAT”

In addition to each city’s 2-day event, we’re offering an “Extra Beat,” an optional activity to highlight the area’s cultural-and musical--opportunities. The Extra Beat will take place in each city either before or after the 2-day event and will include something just for fun. Whether it’s a walking tour, a guided tour through an exclusive facility, or an extra chance for learning, the Extra Beat will help to extend your experience in the area.



OTHER UPCOMING PROGRAMMING

JANUARY: HOW TO SING FROM CHANT NOTATION

The human voice possesses a unique role among the musical instruments employed in Christian worship. It is the only instrument that can communicate words, and words are an inseparable part of the sacred Liturgy. Chant is, at its heart, sung speech. Think of your experiences singing the dialogues of the Mass: “The Lord be with you.” “And with your spirit.” “Lift up your hearts.” “We lift them up to the Lord.” “Let us give thanks to the Lord, our God.” “It is right and just.” These are all chants.

In this four-week course attendees will delve into the workings of traditional chant notation (also called square, or quadratic notation). They will learn to navigate pitch on the four line staff with ease, how to express basic neumes (groupings of notes), develop an ear for the eight Gregorian modes, and explore rhythmic nuances of this unique notation. The workshop will be conducted in a virtual masterclass format, giving attendees the opportunity to experience firsthand how to develop your sight singing skills between classes.

In addition to demystifying the notation, this workshop will emphasize the development of sight singing skills, and the relationship of melody and sacred text.

Dates & Times

January 27, February 3, 10, and 17, 2025
8:00-9:30 pm ET | 5:00-6:30 pm PT

Pricing

Non-members:	Select-level members:	Standard-level members:
\$65 (includes 3-month trial of NPM membership)	\$50	\$45
Select Plus-level members:	Premium-level members:	
	\$47	\$42.50

About the Presenter



Angela Marie Rocchio has been singing, teaching, and conducting chant in sacred and secular settings for more than a decade. Her interest in chant was sparked during a year in study within the monastic tradition. She has studied at the Abbaye Saint-Pierre in Solesmes, France, under renowned chant master, Dom Daniel Saulnier, and other chant instructors from around the globe.

As founder and director of the Cathedral Chant School in the Diocese of Peoria, Illinois, Angela designed and implemented an extensive curriculum, and conducted chant for liturgies at the Cathedral of Saint Mary of the Immaculate Conception. She has presented chant workshops for multiple dioceses, sacred music institutions, universities, and parish choirs. She is also a freelance singer for weddings, funerals, and special events.

Angela resides near Saint Louis, Missouri, with her husband, Michael, the co-founder and instructor for the International Chant Academy.



FEBRUARY: UPDATED HIRING GUIDE DOCUMENT AND WEBINAR

The Director of Music Ministries (DMM) Forum is preparing its final revisions of the NPM resource, "Hiring a Director of Music: A Handbook and Guide," first published in 1991 and later revised in 2006. The document is a guide for pastors (and equivalent clergy leaders) and search committees to the hiring of a Director of Music Ministries. This resource goes step by step through the process, providing helpful information on forming a search committee, drafting a position description, advertising the position, interviewing and auditioning candidates, and making the final selection for a Director of Music Ministries. An important underlying purpose of this guide is to educate clergy and lay people on the many responsibilities that comprise a Director of Music Ministries position and the qualities of an effective Director of Music Ministries, so that they may select the best person for their particular position and also ask of that person a fair workload while providing them just compensation.

Once the document is finalized it will be posted on the NPM website in an electronic format. Some of the benefits of posting this document electronically are that it can more easily be updated than a print version, the reader will be able to click directly on links, and as more online employment resources become available, they can be added. If a hardcopy of the resource is desired, a person may print it out for themselves. The Handbook will be accessible in the public area of the NPM website and therefore available to both members and non-members.

NPM will host a live Zoom webinar on **Monday, February 24 at 3 pm ET/12 pm PT** to explore the document further and answer any questions. This Zoom webinar will be free and open to the public. Visit npm.org to register for the webinar today. We thank the DMM Forum for their work on this document!

MARCH: THE SPIRITUAL EXPLORATION OF PSALMS

A Lenten Retreat

What are we, as music ministers, proclaiming, and how can we best do so during the holy walk of Triduum? In this webinar we will reflect on this question and the psalms we will be proclaiming during these special liturgies. It will break open the texts of the psalms, starting with the original scripture and psalm as a whole and offer suggestions of how music ministers might engage the scripture in prayer, study, and personal reflection. This presentation is an opportunity for psalmists, proclaimers of the Word, to enrich their biblical and spiritual preparation in sharing the Psalms with the community and to develop their own spiritual practices. Participants will explore ways to be a conduit for the Holy Spirit to allow for spiritual conversion.

Dates & Times

Monday, March 10, 2025
8:00-9:30 pm ET /
5:00-6:30 pm PT

Cost

Free for NPM members;
\$20 for non-members

About the Presenter



Dr. Mel Kennedy is a musician (musician and missionary), award-nominated recording artist, liturgical trainer, and inspirational speaker. She earned her Doctor of Ministry in Applied Ministries from Graduate Theological Foundation. Mel holds an M.A. in Liturgical Ministry and Graduate Certificate in Pastoral Studies from Catholic Theological Union. She is a National Association of Pastoral Musicians Certified Cantor Colleague. She has shared her ministry at concerts, prayer services, retreats, and conferences across the United States and Canada. Her ministry is about empowering and inspiring men and women to share their faith and radiate God's love through liturgy, service, relationship, and the simple actions of day-to-day life.

MUSICALLY PREPARING THE EXSULTET

The Exsultet is such a distinct moment in the Triduum journey: covered in darkness, punctuated by candlelight, the Exsultet is a 9-minute chant prefacing what is about to happen in the Easter Vigil liturgy. It is often a daunting task, but with the right preparation, it can be an even more uplifting experience, regardless of your musical background.

Join us for a hands-on webinar led by Nicholas Will (Director of Music, the Pittsburgh Oratory) aimed to help both clergy and assigned laypeople prepare for proclaiming the Exsultet to its fullest expression.

Dates & Times

TBD March 2025

Cost

Free for NPM members;
\$20 for non-members

About the Presenter



Nicholas Will is the Director of Sacred Music at The Pittsburgh Oratory and the Founder and Director of the Saint Gregory Institute of Sacred Music. From 2020 to 2024 he served as Director of Liturgical Music and Lecturer at Mount St. Mary's Seminary, overseeing a robust music program and teaching a comprehensive sacred music curriculum at America's largest seminary. Similarly, he served as Director of Liturgical Music at the Pontifical North American College, Vatican City State, from 2018 to 2020.



APRIL: BUILDING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE FOR MINISTERS

A WEBINAR WITH NPM AND THE USCCB

The goal of the Building Intercultural Competence for Ministers (BICM) training is to increase the capacity to welcome, receive and encourage all emerging cultural groups to participate and assume leadership roles in the Church. The hope is that, in turn, the participant will train others to do the same. This program is for all ministers and persons in church leadership positions.

The sessions provide an opportunity for ministers to attain a foundational level of competence in intercultural relations and communications. It is also designed to orient trainers to methodology, strategies, and activities suited to teach the content of the program.

This weekly workshop aims to prepare the ministry leader to:

- Articulate the general outlines of a theology and spirituality of ministry in intercultural settings, with special attention to concepts of evangelization and inculturation

- Increase awareness regarding how to communicate appropriately and effectively with persons and groups in cultures other than your own
- Gain the ability to identify and articulate obstacles that impede group interaction
- Provide a rationale for the inclusion and integration of diverse cultural groups into the life and mission of your parish and diocese

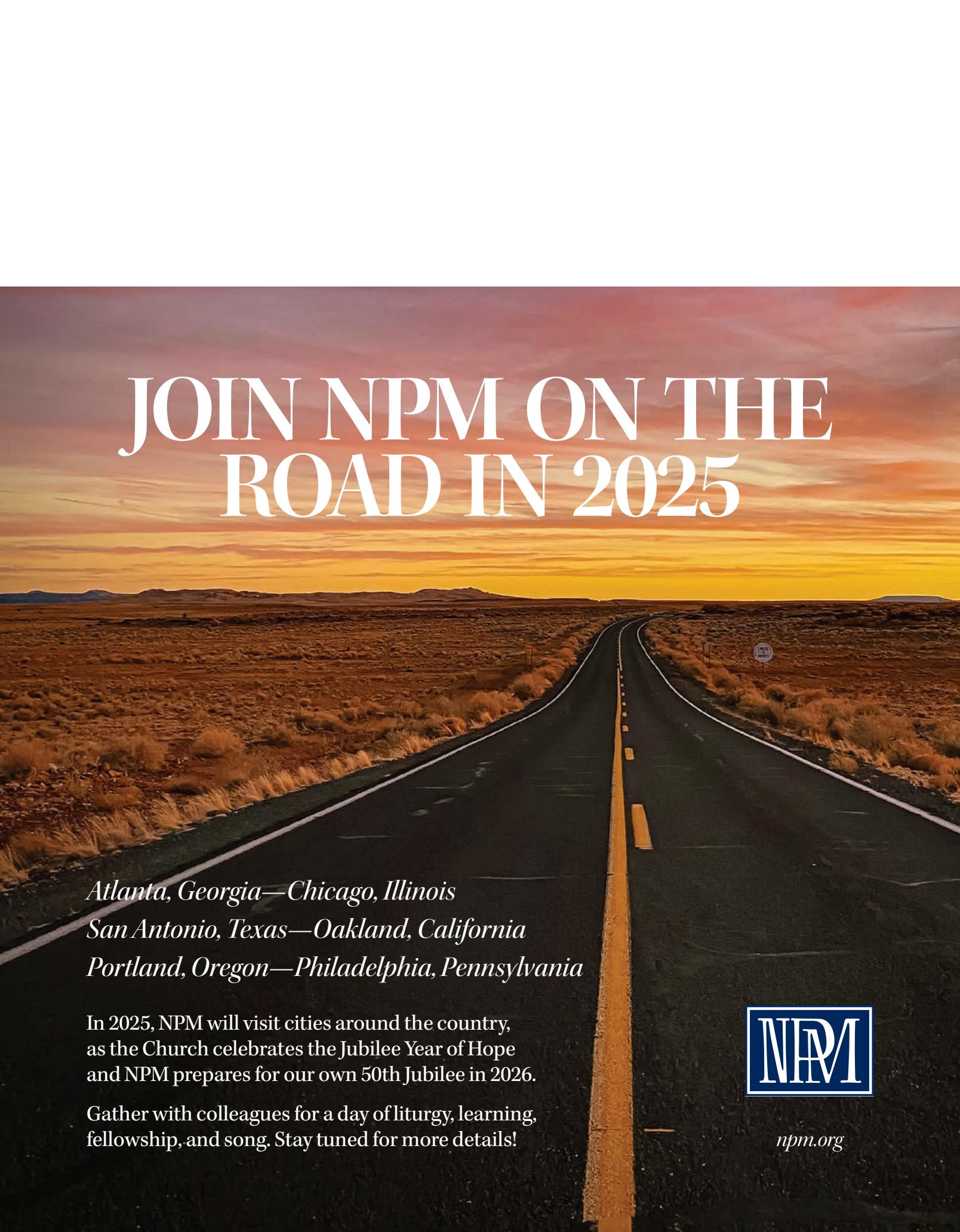
Attendees who attend all four weeks of the sessions will receive a certificate of completion.

Dates & Times

Tuesday evenings | 7:30-9:30 pm ET | 4:30-6:30 pm PT
April 29, May 6, May 13, and May 20, 2025

Cost

Registration is free and all are welcome



JOIN NPM ON THE ROAD IN 2025

Atlanta, Georgia—Chicago, Illinois

San Antonio, Texas—Oakland, California

Portland, Oregon—Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

In 2025, NPM will visit cities around the country, as the Church celebrates the Jubilee Year of Hope and NPM prepares for our own 50th Jubilee in 2026.

Gather with colleagues for a day of liturgy, learning, fellowship, and song. Stay tuned for more details!



npm.org