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Sing

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"The Snowbird Statement on Catholic Liturgical Music," named for the Utah town where it was originally drafted in 1992, discusses liturgical music renewal since the Second Vatican Council, and offers recommendations.

The statement affirmed the emphasis on the singing congregation, "as the principal and fundamental musical body." It also affirmed the use of the vernacular and the focus on active participation in Catholic worship since Vatican II.

"Congregational singing in Catholic worship has not yet generally achieved a desirable standard," it stated, however.

Church musical leaders give all kinds of possible reasons for singing not being up to snuff in some parishes, including: the need for a familiar repertory, good acoustics, appropriate accompaniment, good leadership and rapport, commitment and proper music education for children.

Interestingly, they rarely mention the need for ability.

"I don't think the average people have to worry about mechanical things," McGary said. "It's all in the heart, and they need to be convinced that's where it is."

"Everyone can sing 'Happy Birthday,'" noted Father Robert Ring, well-known around the diocese for his singing and cantoring. If a song is familiar, he contended, people will sing.

Miller pointed out that parishes have



Matthew Scott/Staff Photographer

St. Bridget's Church, Rochester, is widely known for its singing.

various ways to help encourage and develop congregational singing.

"If places wanted to be creative, they could offer a special program like 'How to Use Your Voice,'" Miller said. "I don't know what would happen if someone of-

fered that, if people would feel comfortable enough to come."

Such "learning to sing" programs have been offered at the Notre Dame Retreat House in Canandaigua, according to Patricia Albrecht, associate director. She estimated 500 people have attended, many through Elderhostel.

Father Arthur Wendel, CSSR, who departed the retreat house for a new assignment in August, offered such programs as "I'd Love to Sing but I Can't" and "Doe, a Deer."

Rose Angelini of St. Rita's Church in Webster attended one of his singing sessions last September.

"You'd say, 'Oh, I can't do it,'" Angelini recalled. "Actually by the time you got through it, you felt you could do it."

Father Wendel began with group lessons, she said, featuring Broadway tunes as well as sacred tunes.

"We started with a scale and would sing different exercises," she said. "It built up your confidence, it built up your ability to be able to sing."

"You don't have to be an opera star," Angelini added. But people can learn to sing for their own satisfaction, and that pleasure carries over into liturgies, she said.

"Singing is praying twice," she declared.

At Church of the Most Precious Blood, Marisa De Mario, music director, believes some people may be self-conscious and fear being made fun of when they sing.

"My mission is to get everybody to sing, and I think that's where it's going," De Mario stated.

She finds that when choir members are off duty and sit among the congregation, people are appreciative.

"One tells me, 'I love to sit near so-and-so from the choir,'" she reported. "He encourages me to sing too."

"Our pastor (Father William Graf) has a nice voice and I think that helps them, too," she added. Having sung at other churches, she said, "I've found some priests don't sing out as much."

For a better perspective on the state of music in the diocese, the diocesan

music committee will begin "listening sessions" around the diocese in September, Miller said. The committee plans to gather choirs, presiders and cantors, to discuss needs and concerns.

"Myself and the office would very much like to support people in the field and would like to know better how to do that," Miller said.

One pastor eager to talk with them is Father Robert Beligotti, pastor of St. Francis of Assisi Church in Auburn.

"We are trying to get people singing here more and more," the pastor said, explaining that parishioners there were accustomed to listening to a choir until recently. "But we could use help in how you do it, when you teach new songs. Do you play through it once? Maybe hum it the second time? And then invite them in? I don't know."

Music ministers report that among the approaches being used at some churches to encourage singing are practicing new songs five minutes before Mass, playing new music during Mass for several weekends before asking the congregation to join in and discussing new songs in the bulletin.

Father Beligotti hopes to teach parishioners traditional as well as contemporary songs such as Marty Haugen's "Shepherd Me, O God." He asserted that it is important that people sing.

"It is the direction we must be moving in, to make the people feel part of what is going on," Father Beligotti remarked.

Church documents cite music as "integral" to liturgy, Miller said, yet people sometimes translate that to mean important, or nice to have.

"I'm not sure we've informed them well as to understanding what the ritual is about," she said. "It is a sung ritual we are participating in."

Among its many criticisms of music in the church, the Snowbird statement noted a "lack of consensus in the church on what constitutes 'good' music, and even the lack of serious discussion of this issue."

Father McMullin said compositions are maturing, although the church has gone through some song books where "we'd write anything we thought of and had people sing even if it was trite and immature."

Church documents basically require only a "noble simplicity," he said, and maintaining the church's treasury of music — chant, motets and sacred songs.

"There isn't any really specific form the church says we must use," he said. "It's just that perhaps we've introduced so much stuff. We don't have one body we feel comfortable with now."

Though individual parishioners may not be able to control many variables affecting singing, they can take note of hints from the "pros" in the diocese:

- Listen to yourself while you're singing; try to blend in.
- Ask someone who sings to listen to you and make suggestions.
- Practice.
- Sit closer to the front to be near others singing.
- Come early and read through the songs to be sung.
- Pray as you sing.

"We can sing," Angelini at St. Rita's said. "Sometimes I sit back and listen to the congregation. It sounds wonderful. It sounds practiced, not thrown together. Like I say, it's praying twice."

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