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Mass MUSIC

Maureen Swift, a parishioner at Holy Name of Jesus Church in Greece, said she recently made a point of telling music director Ron Fabry how much she enjoys his organ music.

"If ever there's any time I appreciate Ron, it's when my husband and I are out of town and we have to go to church somewhere else," Swift remarked.

Then again, Fabry noted, there was the man who didn't care for his version of a hymn he played during Holy Week a few years back.

"He came up to me afterward and said, 'I ought to break your fingers,'" Fabry recalled.

For better or for worse, worshipers apparently care a lot about their liturgical music — which means that parish musicians can be targets for both high praise and harsh criticism.

What is heard and sung each week can depend on many factors: budget for music ministry; skill level of the music director and groups; volunteer participation; liturgical traditions of the parish and/or pastor; and willingness of the congregation to participate.

According to Father Virgil Funk, consistency can be elusive in an era when the Catholic Church is attempting to implement Vatican II initiatives. These

reforms called for greater liturgical participation by the congregation, which in turn changed the approach to music.

"We are in a transitional phase," said Father Funk, founder and director of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians, from his office in Washington, D.C.

While many parishes have implemented guitar music and hand-clapping to get the congregation involved, Fabry noted that other parishes stick by what he calls the "four-hymn sandwich" — when the music consists only of traditional hymns during the Mass's opening, offertory, Eucharist and closing.

Father Funk predicted that it could take up to 75 more years before there's a truly cohesive approach to music ministry in the U.S. Catholic Church.

"At some later date there will be more consistency. We will have this diversity and variety, and the best will float to the top," Father Funk remarked.

In the Rochester Diocese, consistency of style is among the issues being addressed at ongoing meetings between parish musicians and Diocesan Music

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