

Choir leader logs 25 years

Mike Latona/Catholic Courier

GREECE — Ralph Zecchino insists that he doesn't seek a concert atmosphere. Even so, Mass-goers who hear the St. Charles Borromeo sanctuary choir — which the 69-year-old Zecchino has directed for a quarter-century — may feel they should have paid admission.

"Once in a while, people do burst into applause," said Zecchino's wife, Sandy, who is also a choir member.

Members' voices blend in with flawless precision, backed by equally fine instrumental support. Hymns on a recent Sunday ranged from the powerful Malotte Lord's Prayer, to the softly sung Irish prayer ("May the Road Rise Up to Meet You ...") after Communion, to a soulful "You Are Mine" to end the liturgy.

Throughout the Mass, Zecchino alternated between conducting the choir and spinning around to face the congregation, energetically gesturing for them to join in. Usually by the time a Mass is over, he said with a laugh, "I'm exhausted." Yet to Zecchino, it's paramount to encourage participation.

"I don't want dad or mom to say 'I have a terrible voice.' They should be singing and encouraging their kids to sing. That's what it's all about," he stated.

That means that the choir's main goal, despite its immense talents, is to enhance the liturgy rather than dominate it. "The one reason we're here is to worship," Zecchino said.

Zecchino had a distinguished musical background prior to starting at St. Charles. A Rochester native, he

graduated from Heidelberg University and the American Conservatory in Chicago. He began teaching in Rochester at Madison High School in 1961, and after eight years moved to Greece Arcadia High School. In 1970 Zecchino founded the renowned Greece Choral Society, which he still directs. The group specializes in classical, oratorio, Broadway and popular music.

Zecchino had been a paid musician at several Protestant churches when in 1978 he began at his own parish, St. Charles. At that point the choir had perhaps 10 or 12 members; today there are more than 50 covering a wide age range. "I'm very conscious of having a feeder system," Zecchino said, noting that he actively pursues young talent.

He brought along one such musician, organist Marcia Sheremeta, when he started at St. Charles. Sheremeta has been there ever since as well, holding her original role and serving as director of music. She also teaches music in the Hilton Central School District.

Zecchino's connections have helped in maintaining St. Charles' high musical standards. Greece Choral Society members and former Greece Arcadia students — even some non-Catholics — are among the choir members.

The choir sings every other Sunday except during the summer, al-



Leila Navidi/Catholic Courier

Ralph Zecchino, who has directed the choir at Greece's St. Charles Borromeo Parish for 25 years, leads parishioners in song during Mass Nov. 2.

ternating between 9:30 and 11:30 a.m. Masses. It also gives public performances in such venues as nursing homes and the Greece Performing Arts Sacred Music Festival.

Highly regarded by his peers, Zecchino has received numerous awards and honors and has also been an adjunct teacher at the Eastman School of Music. He retired from Greece Arcadia in 1995 but is still going strong with the Greece Choral Society and his part-time position at St. Charles.

"I'll do it as long as I can, doing the Lord's work," he said of his parish choir involvement.

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Very few people have been members of the Kierecki family for 100 years, but it's a tradition that can easily be passed on. In 1903 by Father Teofil Kierecki, the first pastor of St. Stanislaus Parish, and has been a parish ever since.

"It was my second son, St. Stanislaus Kierecki was born to Josef and Mary who had emigrated from Poland and occupied town in 1903. He was the youngest of eight children, and he was born in Hudson Avenue St. Stanislaus School and he taught in Polish in 1903.

Kierecki finished high school quickly, skipping a grade and moving straight to college. She graduated at 18 and worked full time at V

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