

Putting Scripture on Our Lips

Here's an understatement for you: Everyone's taste in music is different.

Here's another one: The music grandma and grandpa like is typically different from what the teenagers in the family enjoy.

Here's another: Even if you don't think much of your singing voice, God loves it.

It's virtually impossible to do justice when talking about the music ministry at St. Michael/St. Peter's and Our Lady of Hope parishes without touching the contribution of its director, Tom Andino. If you haven't already read the sidebar, "Who's leading the music?" (right) now's a good time to do so. Tom's, the one individual most responsible for, not only the day to day functioning of this ministry, but also for its growth over more than 25 years.

He's quick to point out that the primary purpose of music in church is to put the words of scripture "on our lips and in our hearts." However, the way music is received and interpreted is unique to each individual so each individual may interpret it a bit differently.

Some of us especially appreciate the music when it's sung acapella. Others prefer brass versus strings. Still others enjoy the organ more than the piano. At the same time, instinctively we know that the music isn't selected simply because someone thinks we'll like it. Although that is one consideration it certainly doesn't keep us from having opinions about the "show" the music ministry put on at the most recent Mass we attended. But it's not a "show," Tom would say.

It's an integral part, a holy part, of the liturgy of the Mass. Likely we'll agree that everyone's understanding of what the Music Ministry is all about may be different.

Before Tom gets started here's another understatement. "Most of us in the pews may not have a strong understanding of what the Church is asking of us, namely strong participation in the Mass.

In a recent conversation, Tom jumped quickly into talking about



We always have room for new musicians.

the purpose of the music ministry. It's easy for us to think that hymns, the selection of hymns, how often certain hymns are used, which one's the Cantors and the choirs like best, etc., are the crux of any discussion of music ministry. Here, Tom notes, "The hymns are not foremost on our minds as a music ministry," starting us down a whole different road. Barely taking a

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Who's leading the music?

The Music Ministry at St. Michael's/St. Peter's and Our Lady of Hope is led by someone with a deep musical as well as liturgical and pastoral understanding of liturgical music, Tom Andino.

Tom first joined SM/SP's parish in 1992 and became Music Director in 1998. So he's not a "Johnny come lately". And, in 2021 he became the music director at OLoH



Tom Andino

Parish as well, when the two parishes came under the pastoral leadership of our then new Pastor, Father Michael Galuppi.

It's a good bet that when most parishioners think of Tom they think of his singing and his talent with the piano and organ keyboards. His music ministry roots reach back to his teen years when he was first learning to play the organ at St. James Parish before it became Our Lady of Hope.

However, to lead a music ministry demands much more than the ability to play the organ or sing hymns. Tom understood this early on. So following on the heels of receiving his Bachelor Degree in Music Education, from the Crane School of Music in Potsdam, NY, he went on to earn a Masters Degree in Theology from St. Bernards in Rochester, NY, with a concentration on Liturgy.

Composer and writer

At least for Tom, music ministry is about a lot more than his schooling. He's an active member of the National Liturgical Composer's Forum. Membership in this organization requires members to have at least three published pieces. In Tom's case he qualified for membership with new pieces he created: "Deo, Gloria, Alleluia", "Hands of Christ" and "Christ's Lullaby", all pieces he introduced in our parish. ■

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If you cannot sing but would like to join the Music Ministry, consider joining the Bell Choir.

adding, . . . “the ‘Litany of the Saints’ and the ‘Acclamations’ during baptisms and after Confirmations. The only hymn at the Easter Vigil Mass,” he adds for emphasis, “is ‘Jesus Christ is Risen Today’, the closing hymn”.

The Church, in part through the music at Mass, calls us to recognize the seasons, those on our desk calendars, like summer, surely, but more importantly those on the Liturgical Calendar, such as Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter and Ordinary Time. Tom notes, “We’ve been using the same Eucharistic Acclamations during our Advent liturgies

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breath he jumps into an explanation. “The Church tells us that the most important music at Mass is found in the Acclamations, the “Holy Holy,” the “Eucharistic Acclamation,” and the “Alleluia”.

It’s not entertainment

He went on to explain, “The Mass, and the music at the Mass is not for our entertainment. And, it’s not meant to be a spectator activity.” However, that doesn’t mean it shouldn’t be executed professionally,” he adds. “We all know that instinctively. “It’s designed to facilitate the sung prayer and the participation of the assembly.”

If you are getting the idea that Tom likes to jump into the deep end of the pool you’re right. So he jumped right in, using the Easter Vigil Mass to make a point. “The music at that Mass is comprised almost totally of Acclamations, Psalm Refrains and Ritual songs, not popular hymns” he says,

Me? . . . part of the music ministry?

Do you like to sing? Or, perhaps you enjoy playing a musical instrument. Have you ever had even an inkling that it might be enjoyable to help provide the music for the Mass? Yet, before you could act on that thought you found yourself thinking, “Na. I’m not that good of a singer.” Or, “I don’t play the violin, or the trumpet, or the flute, etc., etc. very well yet.”

It’s a safe bet that the members of the music ministry you are used to hearing would disagree with you. Tom tells us, “New members often have plenty of room to grow. The point is no one has to be accomplished as a singer or at playing a musical instrument to join the music ministry.

“There are no auditions.

“We’re always anxious to welcome new members to enjoy our ministry with us.” He adds, “Our ministry is all about connecting fellow parishioners to the Holy Scriptures through the Mass and we get to enjoy it while we do it.” “And,” he adds, “If you can’t sing, but can read music, consider joining the Bell Choir at OLoH.”

If you are hesitant to join the music ministry ask yourself, can I learn and grow with more experience and involvement? Would I only consider participating in any other community activity if I thought I had the depth of experience current members enjoy? For example, is every player on a community softball team a star player? Is every member of a community theater an experienced actor? Of course not.

There’s likely a role in the St. Michael’s/St. Peter’s or Our Lady of Hope Music Ministries just waiting for someone like you to step up and fill it.

Tom says, “Come on up the stairs (to the choir loft). Let us know you have a feeling that you might enjoy being part of what we do. That feeling may just be the Holy Spirit moving you.” ■

Have a favorite song you would like at mass?

Take a quick trip to the choir loft to let Tom know if you have a favorite song you would like played at a particular Mass, he's always open to try and include all requests.

for many years based on “Oh Come, Oh Come Emmanuel.” That’s because the church tells us the music should “sound like the season”. In this case we’re talking about the Liturgical seasons, of course. The music builds in our subconscious and it begins to “sound like the season” . . . “to feel like the season” . . . The music during Advent leads us to the approaching season of Christmas.

In some seasons certain music is longer, for example during the Easter season the “Gloria” and the “Alleluia” may seem long. That’s because the Easter season is all about Glory and Alleluia and the music settings are designed to highlight this fact. Even Tom feels the stress of playing the same, long “Alleluia” . . . for five Masses every weekend. But, that’s part of Easter, Tom would tell us, adding “Easter is about Alleluia! The church wants us to be aware of what the season is about and what it’s calling us to,” he adds.

Tom understands “the need for both stability in the musical repertoire as well as for allowing new songs to become part of the musical fabric of the parish.” So, with this recognition the ministry is regularly looking for songs we don’t know that could be used with broader application. That’s brought us songs such as “Jerusalem My Destiny,” “Taste and See” and “Christ Our Light,” he notes. More recently songs such as “These Alone Are Enough,” “Ever We



Cantors and choir members bring musical life to the Mass.



Whether you like singing or play a musical instrument, you’re encouraged to join us.

Praise You,” and “Belong” have been worked in. He’s quick to note the importance of understanding where the church is coming from when we’re discussing the music. “The church tells us,” he adds using the Easter season as an example, “that our churches should “Look like Easter, smell like Easter,

and sound like Easter.” Toward that end, during the various “seasons of the church”, Tom notes that the text for some “regular parts of the Mass, such as the “Glorias” and the “Acclamations”, don’t change but the music that accompanies them does.

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Connecting the Mass to daily life

Finding music that connects with the scriptures prominent in a particular season, in the Masses of that season, and with everyday life is an important challenge in music ministry. So, he is always trying to select music that fits the congregation and that will put the words of the scriptures in a given Mass, “on the lips of the faithful.”

An example of “putting the scriptures on the lips of the faithful” occurs when the congregation sings a hymn such as “Be Not Afraid.” In the third verse, parishioners find themselves singing the words from scripture, “Blessed are your poor, for the Kingdom shall be theirs.”

So, by now it should be obvious that Tom’s not just picking music based on what he likes or doesn’t like. Among other things, besides

incorporating the comfort of the congregation with his music selections, he’s trying to stabilize the repertoire for the choirs and Cantors to keep them engaged.

When Tom is planning music for a Holy Day of Obligation Mass, or a Mass on Easter Sunday or Christmas, or any Mass for that matter, he’s not just thinking about what he knows from experience is popular with parishioners or is easy for parishioners to sing, he’s making a special effort to include selections that meet the Liturgical needs of the church.

Sometimes that process goes a bit further than we might think. For example, as we participate in Mass week after week, we might begin to notice that the words to a particular piece of music are new to us, yet at the same time we’re comfortable

singing them because the tune is familiar. The credit goes to Tom for making the effort to find tunes with lyrics that fill the need to “put the words of scripture on the lips of the faithful” and yet simultaneously make a new hymn a little easier for the congregation to grapple with.

Tom encourages us, when we’re thinking about the music at Mass or any liturgical celebration, to remember that his challenge is about more than whether or not we ‘enjoy’ the song. The music should be looked at as a prayer,” he says. “Even if you feel you can’t sing . . . pray the song’s words. In them you’ll find a rich theology, because each song is a prayer and part of our communication with God.” ■

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