

We are going to sing this summer!

On Monday, 27 May 2013, I received an email from a member of the Irish Church Music Association, telling me what happened at the previous day's Sunday Mass. Before the final hymn the choir director went to the ambo, 'thanked the parish priest and all and sundry and then said that she was looking forward to being back with us in September!'

From a conversation later that day I recall some comments: 'people still go to Mass during the summer...' 'choirs do not need three months holidays...' 'choirs are not needed during the summer...' 'music can be the responsibility of others...' 'anyway, choirs must know their role...'

In many of our parishes throughout the country, liturgical music is an integral part of our Sunday celebration. The choir exercises its liturgical function within the assembly and, by its role, helps to add beauty and solemnity to the big and small occasions. During the summer months, the ministry of music needs to continue – 'people in our parishes go to Mass;' 'visitors come to our parish and go to Mass!'

The ministers of music are many: psalmist, cantor, organist, members of the choir, and other instrumentalists each playing their part to maintain in assisting the assembly's full participation in singing the songs, responses, and acclamations which are constitutive elements of the liturgy. What is important to remember is that, during the summer months, all the ministers need not be present at any one time - and yet the presence of music can be maintained.

During the summer months the role of the cantor can be exercised to the full. Individual members of the choir who are comfortable leading the assembly in song may volunteer to take on this role during the summer. The cantor then will lead the assembly singing the Eucharistic Prayer Acclamations – Sanctus, Memorial Acclamation, Amen, from *Sing the Mass*. The cantor could go to the ambo to lead and encourage the assembly into the proclamation of the Word of God in the Psalm by introducing the Psalm responses, the Gospel Acclamation to the assembly, and by singing the verses of the responsorial psalm and the Alleluia and Gospel verses. During these months the cantor can lead the assembly with well know songs of praise: entrance songs, communion songs, and sometimes a recessional song. All of these can be done with or without the accompaniment of the organist or other instrumentalists.

However, the organist and other instrumentalists who have the particular role of supporting and encouraging the assembly's participation through song need not be present or absent every weekend. They, too, can plan a summer roster. If the organist is present, s/he can take the opportunity to play a more elaborate piece of music at the end of Mass instead of a recessional song, therefore adding variety to the Sunday celebration. When other instrumentalists are present they, too, can take the lead at this time with an appropriate piece of music.

If it works during the summer, maybe keep it going the whole year round! Yes, choirs do need a holiday: music does not.

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