

THE LITURGICAL SINGER

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CHOIR

WHY SHOULD YOU SING IN A DIOCESAN CHOIR?

JENNIFER PASCUAL

Have you ever sung in a diocesan choir? Have you ever thought of joining a diocesan choir but never really made the move to do so? What's holding you back? There are so many benefits to joining a diocesan choir that you shouldn't wait any longer!

Diocesan practices vary, but the diocesan choir could participate in a number of liturgies that are particular to cathedrals. Rite of election, call to continuing conversion, the Chrism Mass, and ordinations to the priesthood and diaconate are some of the main diocesan cathedral liturgies. It truly is a privilege to be able to participate in these liturgies with people who are soon to become Roman Catholics, deacons, or priests. It is also quite a moving experience to see people from many parishes coming together for worship at a cathedral. The diocesan choir provides music for such important events, and the musical worship is even richer when the diocesan choir combines with the cathedral choir for a really massive sound (and good politics!).

The experiences of a diocesan choir do not have to be limited to liturgies at the cathedral, however. Diocesan choral concerts, hymn festivals, and other musical or liturgical events could take place throughout the diocese at different parishes or even at the local seminary. These experiences would give you the privilege of traveling to

IN THIS ISSUE . . .

By the time you receive this issue we will be in the midst of the Easter Season—which I hope is filled with all the joy of heartfelt *Alleluias*! In the best circumstances we achieve these joyous sounds through working together, combining our efforts and voices as one. Our articles in this issue feature many ideas on how to communicate, collaborate, blend, and exist peacefully together.

Doctor Jennifer Pascual, director of music ministries at St. Patrick Cathedral in New York City, shares her thoughts about why choir members should consider singing not only in their home parish but also in their diocesan choir. Doctor Michael Connolly examines vocal blend in "Singing the Exact Same Vowel." Looking at the challenge of working together from a broader perspective, Father Jim Chepponis examines the always-challenging subject of communication and collaboration. David Martinez shares his thoughts on "The Collaborative Music Director," and Maureen Valenzi reveals what may be the ultimate dedication in service—what life is like being married to a music minister!

In our prayer this month, we feature a passage from the book *Peace of Heart in All Things—Meditations for Each Day of the Year* by Brother Roger of Taizé with a related quote from St. Paul, which touches the subject of communication and working together. Whether you have had good or bad experiences in collaboration and communication in your parish, the truth is that working together is not always easy, and there is always room for improvement. May we do our best during this Easter Season to share our Easter joy with others, "striving for the same goal, sharing the same love, being one in heart and soul" (Philippians 2:2).

In the Love of the Risen One,

Mary Lynn Pleczkowski
Editor

places in your diocese that you otherwise might never visit to participate in a liturgy or perform in a concert.

WHAT IF . . .

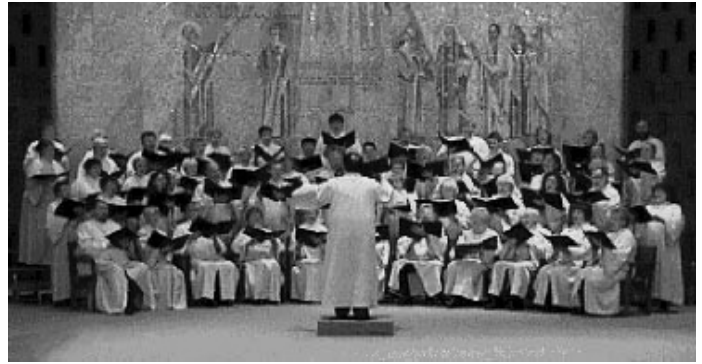
And what if the pope just happens to visit your diocese? It is usually a once-in-a-lifetime privilege to sing in the choir for a papal Mass! The very archdiocesan choir that I currently conduct—the New York Archdiocesan Festival Chorale—was the choir that I joined in 1994 as a soprano in preparation for Pope John Paul II’s visit to New York City in 1995. After the completion of Mass on a cold and rainy October day in 1995, the Pope came over to greet us while we were singing the “Hallelujah” chorus from Handel’s *Messiah* as a postlude.

Okay, suppose the pope doesn’t happen to drop in for a visit: You could still fly over to Rome and sing for him! If your diocesan choir is fortunate enough (and wealthy enough!) and has close enough camaraderie to spend a week together, it is so worthwhile to schedule a diocesan choir pilgrimage to Rome (or to anywhere in the world, for that matter). The diocesan choir could sing for the Holy Father at the weekly papal audience and—if lucky enough and with the right clerical connections—even take a picture with him! And if the pope happens to be the ordained celebrant of the Sunday Mass in St. Peter’s Basilica at which your diocesan choir is singing, all the more power to you! There are many parish choirs that make such a trip on their own, but realistically today, it is easier logistically and financially to get members from several parish choirs together to take a week off from work than to arrange for one choir from one parish to accomplish this.

Okay, suppose the pope doesn’t happen to drop in for a visit . . .

Surely, a week together with a group of people strengthens bonds that would not be so strong otherwise, but even if you never leave your diocese, the number of friendships that form as a result of experience in a diocesan choir are great. If you don’t make friends with everyone in the diocesan choir, you may at least make friends with the people in your section! I have witnessed the development of some very strong friendships that have lasted well over a decade as a result of meeting in the New York Archdiocesan Choir—friendships so strong that the friends wouldn’t mind rooming with each other for a whole week in a foreign country!

In addition to having a lot of fun, you gain so much musical experience as a result of joining a diocesan choir. First, if you are a chorister in your local parish, you get twice the amount of experience per week (if your diocesan



Diocesan choir of the Diocese of Madison, Wisconsin

choir as well as your parish choir rehearses weekly) and a varied experience with two different music directors. You learn twice as much repertoire, and you really do grow as a musician. If you are a person who does everything by rote, this is a chance for you finally to learn how to read musical notation. If you are a highly skilled musician, this is a chance for you to learn how to phrase really well, to see the big musical picture in a score, and even to help those around you who are not quite as quick to get to the final result. Also, as an NPM member, you can spread the word and encourage others in the diocesan choir to become members!

Many diocesan choirs learn music in languages other than English and Latin. It’s a great venue to learn the music of other cultures and the pronunciation of their languages. I have heard diocesan choirs sing in Polish, Italian, French, German, Spanish, Portuguese, French Creole, Tagalog, Vietnamese, Chinese, and other languages.

Children’s diocesan choirs are also a wonderful thing, in part because children learn foreign languages much faster than most adults. They are like sponges; they absorb everything. And people love to listen to the beautiful, unchanged sound of a child’s pure singing voice. Children’s choirs as well as adult choirs can participate in diocesan liturgies and events, especially when the liturgy or event is targeted for the youth. What is truly wonderful and ideal is the combination of the diocesan adult and children’s choirs in a liturgy or performance. Children are the future, and as they mature into young adults, they can “recycle” into the adult diocesan choir!

So what are you waiting for? If you know who the diocesan choir director is, give that person a call and find out what it takes to join the diocesan choir. If you don’t know who to contact, call your local cathedral music office or chancery worship office. The rewards are great, and the education, experience, and friendships last a lifetime!



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