

SMALL AND RURAL PARISHES, DOING THE BASICS WELL

Tom Porter
Professor of Music
University of Mary
tjporter@umary.edu

We cannot all do great things, but we can do small things with great love. (Mother Teresa)

Topic: What are the basics of liturgy, and how do we do it well, regardless of our size or geographical location?

Premise: Every organization, community, parish has limitations

- The number of families, the number of musicians, the number of liturgical ministers—all relative to our other experiences and the experiences that we use as comparison (e.g. my parish of 800 families is large in ND, but small in a metropolitan area)

Today's work

- Consider the importance of ritual to our ministry within our communities
- Discuss how understanding ritual unlocks opportunities to do things well

Respect
Hospitality
Service

What is ritual? How do we define it? How do we know when we are celebrating ritual action? There are the characteristics common to all ritual, including our liturgical celebrations:

1. There is a common experience at the core of the action.
Paschal Mystery—dying and rising of Christ
Root meaning develops with time—it is active, not static
Not totally reliant on a past event, but on that event in time (including our time)
Rituals express, capture, frame, transform an already existing experience
2. Ritual is something that we do, not something that we watch
Ritual is something we become, something that happens outside and inside
Ritual is autobiographical, it is our story
3. Ritual is something we do over and over again, we know it by heart
 - There is pattern, form, rhythm to the way we do things that allows us the freedom to do more—it enables us to move past form to prayer
 - Not empty shell, not simply rubrics or stage directions, but the essence of the experience
 - Not routine, the mindless repetition of an action
4. There is a purpose to what we do, a meaning deeper than the form or action
 - There is a transformative power to our ritual, it changes us, gives us meaning and makes us different (better) people when we complete it (mission)

5. Rituals belong to communities

- Common experience touches every aspect of the definition
- Not my root experience, but ours
- Not my personal choice of behavior or action, but my willingness to participate in the action of a community (posture, singing, praying, listening)
- Not my goal or mission, but the mission of the Church, the mission of the community of faith

Ritual Time: The Liturgical Year

I measure time by the seasons of the Church, began Fra Ludovico, and every year begins anew, with Advent; it's the same year, over and over, indistinguishable from one another—(Mirror, Mirror by Gregory Maguire—Author of Wicked—p. 212)

Fra Ludovico has it somewhat right

Every year begins anew

Advent is the start of our liturgical season

However, liturgical time is not a circle--the same each year, indistinguishable from year to year. It is more like a spiral, we progress but pass through similar planes

Doing the basics well in any parish (regardless of size) is celebrating the liturgical year well

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy states,

Within the cycle of a year, moreover, the Church unfolds the whole mystery of Christ, from his incarnation and birth until his ascension, the day of Pentecost, and the expectation of blessed hope and of the Lord's return. Recalling thus the mysteries of redemption, the Church opens to the faithful the riches of the Lord's powers and merits, so that these are in some way made present in every age in order that the faithful may lay hold on them and be filled with saving grace. (#102 b-c)

What a wonderful vision of how time is measured in our liturgical life. As ministers of the Church, we make this our goal, our responsibility—our choice of music, our time in preparation, our demeanor in serving others is meant to open to the faithful the riches of the Lord's powers and merits, so that these are in some way made present in every age in order that the faithful may lay hold on them and be filled with saving grace.

SUNDAY

The celebration of ritual time begins with the celebration of Sunday. Sunday within the week is a microcosm of the Liturgical Year.

General Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar state

The Church celebrates the paschal mystery on the first day of the week, known as the Lord's Day or Sunday. This follows a tradition handed down from the apostles and having its origin from the day of Christ's resurrection. Thus Sunday must be ranked as the first holy day of all. (GNLY 4)

How we ritualize Sunday

Acclamations are the heart of our ritual action, they highlight the climax points of our celebration

Gospel acclamation

Acclamations of the Eucharistic Prayer: Holy

Memorial Acclamation
Amen

Processions represent the people of God in process, moving toward our common goal
Opening Song, gathering of the people
Communion Song, we do what we are, our action represents us

Other significant moments

Psalm, sung word of God, not just a “response” but a moment of scripture
Parts of the liturgy: Kyrie
Gloria
Lamb of God

What are the practical implications of this Sunday as the primary feast for us in our ministries? We are going to take a few minutes to consider this in small groups and then report back.

Consistently singing familiar music at significant points in the liturgy each Sunday engrains in our community that sense of “repeated behavior” that is conducive to ritual prayer. When we understand the importance of ritualizing Sunday, we begin to see the poetry of the Liturgical Year. Sunday is expanded to season, stretched in both directions as our celebrations give us the grace of time to prepare, celebrate, and to bask in the glow of the Paschal Mystery.

Our primary liturgical seasons grew around feasts that express the mystery of our faith. General Norms for the Liturgical Year state:

Lent/Triduum/Easter

- +The Easter triduum of the passion and resurrection of Christ is the culmination of the entire liturgical year (GNLY 18)
- +The fifty days from Easter Sunday to Pentecost are celebrated in joyful exultation as one feast day, or better as one “great Sunday.” (GNLY 22)
- +“These above all others are the days for the *singing* of the Alleluia.”
- +Lent is a preparation for the celebration of Easter...(GNLY 27)

Advent/Christmas

- +Next to the yearly celebration of the paschal mystery, the Church holds most sacred the memorial of Christ’s birth and early manifestations. This is the purpose of the Christmas season. (GNLY 32)
- +Advent has a twofold character: as a season to prepare for Christmas when Christ’s first coming to us is remembered; as a season when that remembrance directs the mind and heart to await Christ’s Second Coming at the end of time. Advent is thus a period for devout and joyful expectation. (GNLY 39)

Ordinary Time

Apart from these seasonal feasts we celebrate 33 or 34 weeks that are “devoted to the mystery of Christ in all its aspects.” (GNLY #43), time that is marked by a progression of readings from scripture that takes us from the beginning to the end of Christ’s life and ministry.

Seasonal planning is a key to the liturgical life of any community. It dictates the ebb and flow of who we are and what we do. As pastoral musicians, when we tap into the rhythm of liturgical seasons, we set the stage for doing the basics well.

Ritual is

A human activity, something we do

Creatively give life, it demands something of who we are

Expected patterns of behavior or rules of action, the forms that allow us to function

As we do our part in the preparation of liturgical celebrations, regardless of the size or location of our parish, the crucial questions become,

“What are the basics?” (acclamations, processions and the psalm)

“What can we do well?”

It is better for us and for our communities to do well those things that we can do well, and to build on that over time, rather than to try to do everything and end up with mediocrity.

RESOURCES FOR COMMUNITIES SMALL IN NUMBER LARGE IN FAITH

Tom Porter
Professor of Music
University of Mary
tjporter@umary.edu

PREFACE

Selections from *Dakota: A Spiritual Geography*

How do we tell the truth in a small town? Is it possible to write it? Certainly, great literature might come out of the lives of ordinary people on the farms and ranches and little towns of the Plains, but are the people who farm, the people working in those towns, writing it? The truth, the whole truth, tends to be complex, its contentments and joys wrestled out of doubt, pain, change. How to tell the truth in a small town, where, if a discouraging word is heard, it is not for public consumption?

Artists are suspect in American society, as they bring uncomfortable truths to the surface. But the silence (in a small town) disturbs some who seek after truth.

Perhaps it will be another generation before the story of these days can be told. Perhaps, given the distance that the passage of time can provide, they will give us back the truth about ourselves. Whether or not we will listen, I cannot say.

INTRODUCTION

Liturgy demands a willingness to be vulnerable, to be open, to share the most intimate part of human experience (relationship with our creator and relationship with one another). In small communities we do not have the gift of anonymity...we live together, work together, fight with each other, raise our children together, experience the highs and lows of emotions. People know our dirty little secrets and we know theirs, and this complicates liturgy—it makes it real in ways that larger parishes spend countless hours trying to recreate.

We are here today to talk about resources for pastoral musicians in smaller communities. I have some experiences to share; we have some music to sing. However, I believe your best resources are:

CHURCH TEXTS

- Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy
- GIRM—having an understanding of the ritual flow
- General Norms for the Liturgical Year
- Sing to the Lord
- Lectionary—the word of God as starting point for liturgical preparation
- Sacramentary—going through the ritual texts for the season

These are our primary sources for liturgy preparation. They are resources that we must read and re-read as liturgical ministers and servants of our community. They keep us grounded and focused on the spirit and the intention of the Church.

The full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else, for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit. (CSL 14)

The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value, greater even than that of any other art...as sacred song closely bound to the text, it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy...Therefore sacred music will be the more holy the more closely it is joined to the liturgical rite, whether by adding delight to prayer, fostering oneness of spirit, or investing the rites with greater solemnity. (CSL #112) (Texts consistent...#121)

Great importance should be attached to the use of singing in the celebration of the Mass...preference should be given to those that are more significant and especially to those to be sung by the priest or deacon or reader, with the people responding or by the priest and people together. (GIRM 40)

Singing is one of the primary ways that the assembly of the faithful participates actively in the Liturgy. The people are encouraged "to take part by means of acclamations, responses, psalms, antiphons (and) hymns...The musical formation of the assembly must be a continuing concern in order to foster full, conscious, and active participation. (STL 26)

The Church places tremendous value and a tremendous burden of responsibility on its musicians. It is so much more than picking an Opening Song, Offertory Song, Communion Song and Closing Song. It is participating in the ritual action of the liturgy; it is knowing what the ritual is about (knowing the sources) and investing our own knowledge and experiences (being the sources). It is a willingness to let go of personal preferences when they come in conflict with what is best for the assembly, the season, the liturgy.

Parish Resource: Who are your resources? What are your resources?

Liturgy Committee

Pastor

Musician

Catechist

Environment

Volunteer Ministry Coordinator

Members at large, giving the perspective of the person in the pew

PARISH PRACTICES

There is a progression that we must recognize as pastoral musicians in order for our community to have a positive ritual experience of music in the liturgy.

Hear it (in our ear)

- Most people do not read music, they learn it by rote
- If we give them a song in bites that are too large to manage, they will not be successful in moving to the next level

Learn it (in our mind)

- As musicians, how do we successfully learn music?
- How do we teach piano students, voice students, choir members, etc. a new piece of music?
- How do we teach music to our assembly? Are we good and patient teachers who enable the process of learning?

Sing it (in our voice)

- Once we as a community have a piece "in our ear" and we have an understanding of form and direction, we can sing it with confidence. When we are talking about the basics of ritual planning, this is the minimum level that we want for our basics, our acclamations and our processions.

Pray it (in our heart)

- There are songs every community knows and prays. They are the songs we “know by heart.”

With this in mind, the first examination of parish practices is to make an inventory of music (hymns, acclamations, other mass parts, special music) and to designate it into the four categories, hear it, learn it, sing it, pray it. At the same time, we can divide it into seasons.

I like using excel files for data because I can set up my own fields and, once entered, can access the information in any category. A basic database might contain the following information:

Title	Season	Text	Style	Level	Choir	Instruments
O Come, O Come Emmanuel	Advent	O antiphons	Procession	4	Yes	C instrument
O Come, All Ye Faithful	Christmas		Procession	4	Yes	Brass
Tree of Life	Lent	Haugen	Procession	2	Yes	No

It seems like a lot of trouble. Don't we all have enough to do? But the alternative is to rely on whatever hits us at the moment. Our ministry is too important for that. Our choices shape people's prayer, and we should always remember the weight of that responsibility.

Using this model, think of the categories in terms of one song you used this past year. What other categories would be helpful to you? (e.g. library numbers of choir pieces, composer, hymnal number, whether or not a lower key accompaniment is available)

LITURGICAL YEAR

The next step in building your resource is to consider the essential musical elements of the liturgy within the context of the liturgical year.

(Dialogues: would be consistent throughout the year)

The heart of the planned liturgical music is the acclamations. Inventory your current acclamations if you have more than one set that people know, and use them to define time. If possible, begin by designating three sets of acclamations, one for each liturgical season.

Advent/Christmas

Lent/Triduum/Easter

Ordinary Time

Think of the season as a whole, then consider how to distinguish the joyful preparation of Advent from the fulfillment of Christmas using the same music...What would you do? (accompaniment, obbligato, descant, tempo) How do we dress up the music for the season of Easter (not just Easter Sunday)?

The idea behind this is that the parish has a set of acclamations that belong in category 4, prayable, or at least in category 3, singable and on the edge of being sung prayer. If you have musicians who pride

themselves on the individuality of their music (e.g. the contemporary group or the adult choir) it is important to find music that bridges the gap, that everyone can take ownership in. Acclamations belong to the parish and not the individual. This is that willingness to let go of personal preferences when they come in conflict with what is best for the assembly, the season, the liturgy.

A second category for our music inventory is processions. Here is a bit of information from the Church documents:

When the people are gathered, and as the Priest enters with the Deacon and ministers, the Entrance Chant begins. Its purpose is to open the celebration, foster the unity of those who have been gathered, introduce their thoughts to the mystery of the liturgical time or festivity, and accompany the procession of the Priest and ministers. (GIRM 47).

While the Priest is receiving the Sacrament, the Communion Chant is begun, its purpose being to express the spiritual union of the communicants by means of the unity of their voices, to show gladness of heart, and to bring out more clearly the “communitarian” character of the procession to receive the Eucharist. (GIRM 86, also n. 159)

The two major processions have very different personalities. The first is a gathering of the people of God. The second is a sign of the unity that we achieve as we partake in the Eucharistic meal. The action of each procession dictates the language and style of each song.

These two processions have priority in liturgical planning and in terms of the parish’s level of ability. They are not good points to teach new music...the assembly should be able to sing them, to pray them; it would be important that these pieces have achieved a Level 4 in our parish so that they can truly be moments of prayer.

Next we might consider the psalm. The psalm is a unique feature because it is sung scripture, the Word of God. (STL adds an additional musical role to the Liturgy, the Psalmist) In seasonal planning we may choose to use a seasonal psalm (in which case you would select one for the Advent season and a different one for Christmas) or you might select a familiar psalm tone you’re your parish repertoire and set the psalms for the entire season (Advent and Christmas) to the same tone. The music ties the season together, while the texts express the individual Sundays.

OVERALL

There should not be more than one song per season at Level 1 or 2. Special music by a choir or soloists, or introducing the refrain of a song to the assembly and having cantor sing verses are ways to include new music without placing the burden of learning it on the assembly. It is important to allow choirs, cantors, solo singers and instrumentalists opportunities to share their gifts with the community. You will not sustain interest in a choir if they only sing the same thing as the assembly.

When we introduce a new seasonal song, we are really making it a long-term commitment—if we only get to use this Advent song for 4 weeks, and we expect the congregation to grow into praying it, we should consider how that is going to happen over the course of years, not one season. If it doesn’t have that kind of staying power, it is probably best left to special music by a soloist or choir.

BACK TO REALITY

If your best resources are the church documents, your parish personnel, your parish practices, and your own experiences, you will not be swept away by fads. When we as pastoral musicians seek to implement change, the things that affect the congregation are best accomplished in baby steps. Be patient. Regardless of how small our parish is, the church is a big organism and moves slowly.

Sometimes being from a smaller parish enables us to do simplicity well and better than our counterparts in larger parishes. The General Instruction gives us good focus (even though it is in reference to décor):

Church décor should seek to achieve noble simplicity rather than ostentation. The choice of materials for church appointments must be marked by concern for genuineness and by the intent to foster instruction of the faithful and the dignity of the place of worship. (GIRM 292)

How might we apply this directive to music or other areas of our responsibility? We have talked about the season of Advent—Christmas. How might do we make it look and sound noble yet simple?

Look

Vessels, furnishings, vestments, decor
Focus; non-repetition of symbols

Sound

Acclamations (same for all parish liturgies)
A cappella singing on purpose

Smell

Scent of pine from Advent wreath to Christmas tree

Taste

Could Advent/Christmas “taste” different than Lent/Easter? What are the possibilities? Could we have communion under both forms for the entire seasons?
Gestures and postures

Feel

Consistent ritual patterns – unity of the season

SILENCE (Stillness)

Music arises out of silence and returns to silence. (STL 118)

Sacred silence also, as part of the celebration, is to be observed at the designated times. (GIRM 45)

The Liturgy of the Word is to be celebrated in such a way as to favor meditation, and so any kind of haste such as hinders recollection is clearly to be avoided. In the course of it, brief periods of silence are also appropriate, accommodated to the assembled congregation; by means of these, under the action of the Holy Spirit, the Word of God may be grasped by the heart and a response through prayer may be prepared. (GIRM #56).

After communion, the priest and people may spend some time praying silently. (GIRM 88)

Well placed and observed silence (with those in ministry serving as examples) costs nothing and can be implemented in any parish, regardless of size.

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this workshop was to promote resources for small parishes. The solution is that you not only have the important resources that you need, but that you are the important resources for your parish.