

THE LITURGICAL SINGER

SEASON 1
CHOIR 3
CANTOR 4
VOICE 5
RURAL
PARISH 8
APRIL 2004
VOLUME 5:2

A RESOURCE FROM THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PASTORAL MUSICIANS FOR CANTORS, SONGLEADERS, CHOIRS, AND CHOIR DIRECTORS

SINGING THE SEASONS

RUNNING WITH THE LORD

R. GABRIEL PIVARNIK, OP

She only thought of one possible reaction to the dilemma that was before her: Run. Filled perhaps with fear and doubt, she found her small tired feet leaping with every pounding of her heart. Time was of the essence. And although she had barely slept over the last three days, she had to hurry before something else happened.

Such was the reaction of Mary Magdalene in the Gospel of John on Easter Sunday (John 20:1–9). At the sight of the empty tomb, she runs. She runs to tell Peter and the other disciples that Jesus has been taken from the tomb. She runs because she does not understand; she runs because she sees only what she has lost. If that were the end of the Easter story, then she would have no reason to hope, no reason for joy, no reason for proclaiming and singing about the God who loves her. But that is not the end of Mary's story. Almost immediately after that passage in John's Gospel, we see that Mary has returned to the scene of her torment. Broken, bewildered, and confused, she seeks the one person who dared to love her, the Christ, to whom she had dedicated her life. Thinking that she has come across the gardener, Mary Magdalene inadvertently encounters the Lord, who then names her to the very core of her being: "Mary!" And she responds: "Rabboni!" The exchange is so brief and yet so meaningful. And instead of allowing her to cling to all that she remembers about him, instead of basking in the reunion of hearts and souls that have known one another, he gives her a simple command: Run.

But as her feet carried her closer and closer to her destination, any passerby would have noticed that the emotion that drove her was not fear but necessity. She

IN THIS ISSUE . . .

We explore the theme "Easter joy—it's not all about me!" Sometimes, it seems, singers do not have the best intentions at heart as they go about their ministry. Have you, for instance, ever kept count of how many times you got to cantor the *big* Mass, complained if you didn't get a particular solo, or groused about who you were sitting next to in choir?

In this issue we look at some of these issues and try to put them in perspective. Father Gabriel Pivarnik, OP, does a beautiful job of setting the tone in his article, "Running with the Lord" (page one). Lou Valenzi then relates these issues to choir directors and singers in "Choir: Be Team Players and Put the Egos Aside" (page three). And Lori True looks at the importance of the whole assembly in "It's Not about Me; It's about We" (page four).

Our prayer this month is from the book *Prayers for the Servants of God* by Edward Hays. It is a "Prayer of Preparation for a Cantor or Choir Member." Many parishes keep this prayer inside their cantor book, and I hope that it will give you some insight into our ministry.

But that's not all: Be sure to read every article and truly pray about how you can "encourage one another and build each other up" (1Thessalonians 5:11). May you and your families truly experience the joy of this Easter Season! Once you do experience it, make sure you share it with others!

Mary Lynn Pleczkowski
Editor

was moving now not out of a need to feel secure or consoled but out of an overabundance of joy that manifested itself within her as purpose and direction in her own life. Run. The love that she had clung to in the hours of her despair now began to lift her very feet from the ground. Run. And do not stop until the message has been delivered.

It is Mary Magdalene who takes up the song of all creation when she proclaims to the disciples: "I have seen



Georges de la Tour, *Magdalen of the Night Light*, oil on canvas, 1630–1635. Courtesy of the Musée de Louvre, Paris.

the Lord!” (John 20:18). That song echoes through the centuries to the present age as we pick up the mantle of her commission and sing about the God who has loved us, who has restored us in hope, who has risen in the light of Easter joy. What else could it mean for those of us who have been gifted with the awe-inspiring challenge to sing of the Easter resurrection? Called to proclaim our own encounter with the risen Lord, we forget our anxieties and preoccupations and sing about the God who has touched us.

But, all too often, many of us follow Mary’s first reaction to the empty tomb—filled with self-doubt and fear, insecurity and the need for adulation, we think that the music we sing is about us, about our talent, about some wonderful and melodious outpouring of an inner brilliance that has its origin in our vocal cords. For singers of the Word, for those who break open the Paschal Mystery for others, that cannot be our reaction or our mindset.

Instead, we must *run*. Completely abandoning our own agendas and schemes, we must allow the Spirit to propel and fill our song. We must *run* to proclaim with Easter joy not only that “he is risen!” but also that “we have seen

the Lord.” Like Mary Magdalene, we cling not to what we have known or what makes us feel secure, but we *run* to proclaim and sing to others. Easter forces us out of ourselves to proclaim the Gospel of love. Mary Magdalene looks past herself to the message that has been entrusted to her. The love that now fills her is not simply love for the Christ to whom she was told not to cling but love for those to whom she brings the message of salvation. When she arrives and sees the disciples again, she recounts everything that the Lord has said to her. The abundance of joy that was hers at seeing the Lord is now spilling over—it must be shared, it must be proclaimed. The mission she now enjoys has nothing to do with her and everything to do with the message: “I have seen the Lord.”

When we sing and lead our assemblies during this Easter Season, are we singing “ourselves” or the message that has been entrusted to us? Through our ministries, and especially in the liturgical action, we are called to further the mystery that is being celebrated. The proclamation of the Word in voice and in song is meant to lead us to the Eucharistic table. Like the road to Emmaus, our sung proclamation has a direction and an ending point: It points us to the revelation of Jesus in the breaking of the bread. I cannot help but think that in this regard we are like John the Baptist in his recognition of the Messiah: He must increase, I must decrease. We bracket our egos, not in false humility, but so that Christ may increase in us and in the people that we serve. Then—and perhaps only then—will we realize that Mary Magdalene *ran* not of her own accord, but it was the Spirit which ran through her and in her.

She thought of only one possible reaction to the manifestation before her. Run. Filled with the Spirit of hope, she allowed the breath of life to lift her song on high. Time was of the essence. It must be proclaimed: He is Risen! He is Risen! Alleluia! Alleluia! ☸

**Father of unending light, with a glance
you lit a fire of love in the Magdalen
and melted the icy coldness of her heart.**

**Unafraid, she stood by the cross;
anxious of soul, she waited by your tomb
without fear of cruel soldiers,
for love casts out all fear.**

**Christ, true love, wash us clean of sin,
fill our hearts with grace,
and grant us heaven’s reward.**

From Pater superni luminis, the hymn for vespers on the feast of Mary Magdalen, composed by St. Robert Bellarmine (1541–1621). Translation from A Pastoral Musician’s Book of Days, compiled by Gordon E. Truitt (Silver Spring, Maryland: NPM Publications, 2000).

BE TEAM PLAYERS AND PUT THE EGOS ASIDE

LOU VALENZI

“Do you have another copy of the psalm? I left mine at home.” “Someone took my music!” “I’d like to audition for the solo.” “Sorry I’m late. . . .” “Not that I want to be difficult, but, I *can’t* sit next to *her*: She throws me off!” And so on.

Let me ask all choir directors, choir members, cantors, and musicians: Are we always mindful of our purpose as music ministers? Are we putting aside our personal agendas for the good of the whole? Are we team players? Are we building up or tearing down the kingdom of God?

As a music director, I find that some of the things that stand in the way of serving the needs of the whole community at worship may be poor planning, lack of diplomacy, and, sometimes, even lack of humility. Because we directors live our jobs, working many more hours than human beings should, we sometimes tend to behave as though we have all the answers. But we may not. We may need to observe and listen to our assemblies, lest our egos get in the way of our ministry. Is it possible, for example, that the hymn *I* love to play may not be as well loved by *them*? We should ask—often—if we are doing the best we can in selecting music and accompanying in ways that encourage participation. We need to educate ourselves by attending conventions, getting involved in our local NPM chapters, and expanding our repertoires to include our entire assemblies. And we need to be open

to all styles of liturgical music. Contemporary music may not be your passion, but it could bring greater involvement from the youth of your parish.

PRAYING THE REHEARSAL

As a director, I conduct a structured rehearsal. At the start of rehearsal, I distribute an agenda, complete with starting and ending times for each segment. My choirs appreciate receiving a list of hymns and anthems they will sing during the next month. To further enhance communication, I maintain a music ministry website. Not only can the choirs access a list of upcoming music, they can also enjoy pictures or sound bytes from concerts. The site is also useful for quick, mass communication in case of emergencies such as last minute bad weather cancellations.

We begin and end each rehearsal and liturgy with prayer. After all, being in prayer is why we do what we do. I try to involve the choirs in their prayer by asking them for petitions or by assigning a different Bible passage to be read each week by a choir member. I let them take ownership of their prayer.

NAMING EXPECTATIONS

But, even with all the preparation, communication, and prayer there are still frustrations, and we all have our idiosyncrasies. Nonetheless, there are certain expectations I have of my choir members.

To all choir members, being a team player means arriving on time (even early) for rehearsal, having the evening’s music ready to sing, keeping a pencil handy, and saving the socialization for the break or when rehearsal has ended. As a director, I find it most frustrating, when I am giving instruction, to see some people engaged in a conversa-

tion. If you have a question about your music, ask the director instead of discussing it privately during rehearsal. Others will benefit from your question.

Arriving late for rehearsal causes myriad problems. It is disruptive, especially if you have to climb over people to get to your seat—if one has been saved for you. Everyone in your section may have to move in order to make room for you.

Please don’t feel possessive of your place in the choir. If your director seats you in the back row, it is not because you sing poorly. Your director may need to rearrange the choir voices for various reasons. Trust the director, be a team player, and put the ego aside.

Have your music ready. It is unfair to fellow choir members if they have to share their music with you. Not having your music also prevents you from taking directorial notes. And *everyone* should be writing performance notes from the director (pencils only, please). Doing so brings uniformity and quality to your choir’s sound.

As a singer, listen to those around you. The best choir singer is the one who blends his or her voice with others. If you cannot hear those around you, then you are singing too loudly. And please keep your vibrato under control! The best choral tone is a straight one; a choir is not the place to show off your voice. Be part of a team, not a standout.

ASSEMBLY FIRST

Being a music minister entails a great deal of sacrifice. In this Easter Season, let us remember the supreme sacrifice of Jesus Christ by putting ourselves last and our assemblies first. Let us be better prepared, more attentive, more organized, and willing to put our egos aside to enable our parish families to experience the true joy of Easter. ☪

IT'S NOT ABOUT ME, IT'S ABOUT WE

LORI TRUE

Some years ago, the U.S. Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy offered this description of a pastoral musician's ministry: "The church musician is first a disciple and then a minister. The musician belongs first to the assembly; he or she is a worshiper above all. . . . Thus, the pastoral musician is not merely an employee or volunteer. He or she is a minister, someone who shares faith, serves the community, and expresses the love of God and neighbor through music" (*Liturgical Music Today*, 1982, no. 64).

One of the most difficult things that cantors have to remember, therefore, is that what we do is not about "me" but rather about "we." Actions, gestures, words, and attitudes should always keep the community we serve at the center. The



passage from *Liturgical Music Today* provides a wonderful foundation for and source of reflection to keep true to our calling.

DISCIPLE

To be a disciple may seem to some a lofty goal, but the call is there, whether we are comfortable with it or not. To be a disciple is to follow Christ Jesus, to be "stirred up" by our conversion and constantly reflecting on our primary vocation as people of faith who struggle to give witness to the resurrection through lives lived in line with the Gospel. Not all of us are called to be theologians, but we are all called to live, act, and sing from the passion rooted deep in our hearts. We do this as cantors by becoming the song we sing. Sometimes our faith is shared without even saying a word. Often, the most powerful witness comes when we act and live in the name of Jesus without calling attention to ourselves. When we lead our community in prayer, God knows our hearts; God knows our lives. We do not need to "advertise" our discipleship when it is deep within us.

For disciples, the concern for the "we" is a given and is always at the forefront of minds and hearts. Concern is for the community at all times, good and bad. Cantors show this by being present to the community, by staying connected to their lives especially when they are hurting, and by participating in other areas of ministry. As true ministers of music, we do this not only by singing about the poor but also by being with the poor intentionally and by walking with them. When we invest in these goals, our ministry as cantors will have a strong foundation.

MINISTER

True discipleship leads to ministry; it is rooted in our baptism. We

practice discipleship with humility, seeing it as an honor, a privilege, and a tremendous responsibility. A minister focuses on developing gifts and skills in this spirit. There are good singers with lovely voices, who may even "inspire" us, but cantors seek "transparency" in their ministry. Cantors are concerned with the rest of the assembly, concerned about *their* song, *their* faith, *their* participation and belief in the good news. Cantors are believers on the way, wanting others to join them on the journey, and are compelled to proclaim the Gospel message they have heard. They experience ongoing conversion, always aching to connect with and relate to the different groups in parish music ministry and in the wider community.

As ministers, cantors are always deepening their musical and ministerial skills, never settling for "good enough." Cantors practice, study, and grow musically, liturgically, and spiritually for the sake of "we," not for personal desires.

MEMBER OF THE COMMUNITY

To serve as cantor in more than one parish (in some cases, several parishes in one weekend) may be a necessity in some circumstances, but when we do this with no other connection to the communities in which we minister, then that practice is truly contradictory to our call. The parish liturgy is not a "gig" but a place for us to belong. Our primary "right" to stand in front of a community to lead and serve flows from our commitment to be one of them, to walk beside them on the journey of life. We need to know who we serve in order to lead them well. We need to listen to their diverse and wonderful stories. Do we know the parish mission statement? Are we caught up in the vision of the community? This involves more than being a cantor; it

Continued on page seven

STRESS AND VOICE: MORE SERIOUS VOCAL PROBLEMS

BARBARA ESPOSITO ILACQUA

The first part of this article (February 2004) identified the pitfalls that lead to minor voice loss. This second part identifies the more serious vocal problems.

Normally a hoarse voice lingers for only a few days. However, if it becomes a recurrent or more persistent problem, it can be a sign of a number of serious causes ranging from benign vocal cord calluses to cancerous growths. Because hoarseness is a symptom, not a specific illness, any voice change that recurs or lasts for more than two weeks needs to be checked medically. Even serious vocal cord problems frequently have no other signs—no pain—but only the simple voice weakening or loss.

COMMON CULPRITS

The four most common culprits of more serious problems are vocal cord calluses (or nodes); contact ulcers and acid reflux disease; pre-period hoarseness; and smoker's bulges.

Vocal Cord Calluses (or Nodes). Nodes are callus-like bumps that develop opposite each other on the vocal cords. They result from holding the cords together with too much strain. The vast majority of these nodes—like calluses—“soften” and disappear by themselves if the pattern of abuse is changed. The most frequent sources of abuse are speaking, singing, or even whispering habitually and for long periods of

time at an unnatural pitch or volume. Women who lower their voices in an effort to sound more authoritative or individuals who project their voices at a high volume like aerobics instructors, teachers, actors, choir directors, and cantors (who need a microphone but do not have one) are node-prone. Constant throat clearing (even if a symptom of nervousness) is more than an annoying habit: It literally bangs together fragile vocal cords and causes callus-like throat injuries. Most doctors refer serious node problems to a speech pathologist. This professional can also recommend specific breathing exercises and throat relaxation techniques to help produce stronger, more powerful sounds with less strain. If there is no physical problem, only two or three sessions are needed.

Contact Ulcers. Inflamed sores at the back end of the vocal cords are especially common in people whose jobs involve spending hours talking on the telephone (“phoneitis”). They are the result of continually lowering the voice to a pitch below normal conversational level. The prescription is the same as for nodes: voice rest and changing the pattern of abuse.

Acid reflux disease (gastric reflux or GERD) is a condition in which the stomach contents back up and irritate the lower end of the larynx. This also causes coughing which further irritates the vocal cords. If you have GERD, you definitely need to consult a doctor about proper treatment. Steer clear of lying down sooner than two to three hours after eating, and, when necessary, use an antacid to neutralize stomach acid. An OTC remedy such as *Gaviscon* helps to alleviate this problem. However, for more serious acid reflux, prescription medicines (*Prevacid*, *Nexium*) may be necessary. Singers, take note: GERD can interfere with your breathing techniques. Too much air from the diaphragm can also push acid up into the cord area. You and

only you can determine how much air can flow over the cords without causing more vocal problems. Every GERD episode is different; you will have to determine what works for you. A word of caution: Acid reflux disease can cause esophageal cancer. Do not take it lightly!

Pre-period Hoarseness. In the first part of this article, I mentioned a possible surprising cause of hoarseness in some women. This is it. If a woman notices a pattern of recurrent hoarseness just before her period, and especially if she takes aspirin to relieve discomfort, there may be a link. At that time, a woman's capillaries are quite fragile. When you add aspirin or other drugs that are natural blood thinners, plus heavy voice use, the risk of breaking one of the tiny blood vessels on the surface of the vocal cords is quite high. Switch to a pain reliever containing ibuprofen (*Advil*, *Nuprin*), which is less likely to cause a problem. Ruptured blood vessels (also caused by screaming or any sudden vocal “trauma”) usually heal themselves with time and moderate voice rest. It's not unusual for a voice teacher to cancel a student's lesson at this time in order not to harm the voice.

Smoker's Bulges. Smoking seems to be the chief cause of vocal polyps—swollen bumps or growths on vocal cord edges that lead to severe persistent hoarseness. Quitting smoking, along with plenty of vocal rest, may halt polyp growth and restore your normal voice. But in most cases, once polyps are confirmed, surgery could very well be needed. Doctors prefer not to operate, but sometimes it's unavoidable.

SIX STEPS TO A “STRONG” VOICE

1. When speaking, don't force your voice to shrieking highs or drop it to unnatural lows. When singing, use good breathing techniques—from the diaphragm, not from the shoulders/

throat area. Sit and stand properly. Don't sing in a style of voice that is not you!

2. Don't compete with background noise—the blare of a radio or roar of traffic or the subway. If you must speak or sing in a noisy environment, concentrate on good breath support or, if appropriate, use a microphone.

3. If your voice goes on the fritz, talk or sing as little as possible. Take hoarseness and voice loss as a signal that your “instrument” needs a rest.

4. Be aware that many OTC allergy and cold preparations tend to dry mucus secretions, leaving the vocal cords inadequately lubricated and vulnerable to irritation. Dry air can have the same dehydrating effect, so use the humidifier in wintertime and increase your fluid intake (non-alcoholic) during an airline flight.

5. Relieve a dry throat with lots of liquids. Never use ice-cold liquids of any kind while singing, as they constrict the blood vessels. Drink liquids that are at room temperature only. Use throat lozenges that don't contain vasoconstrictors, which cause constriction of the blood vessels. Choose *Cepacol* or *Fisherman's Friend*, for example, but avoid lozenges like *Halls*.

6. When speaking or singing for long stretches, avoid slouching, whether you are standing or sitting. This constricts the airways in your neck and chest and impedes free breathing. Think of your body as a 32' organ pipe!

In conclusion, the key to avoiding voice trouble in the first place—a key supported by The National Association for Hearing and Speech Action—is to develop a few good vocal habits. When used correctly and supported by proper posture, good breathing techniques, and the recognition of oncoming stress-related problems, our voice will always remain with us as our closest friend and ally. For singers after all, the voice is our Stradivarius. 🎻

PRAYER OF PREPARATION FOR A CANTOR OR CHOIR MEMBER

**Lord of Life, I pause in prayer
before the beginning of this service.**

Fill my voice with love for You.

**May the notes that will sound
find their harmony as they pass through my heart.**

**May the song of my mouth
be a hymn of praise to You.**

**May I seek by my voice
to give glory to You
rather than to bring attention to myself.**

**May I seek humble service to the parish community
by the sharing of this gift
with which You, my Lord, have blessed me.**

**Use me, Lord of Rhythm and Harmony,
as You would play upon a hollow reed
so that those whom I am called to serve
may be attuned to Your Spirit and moved to prayer.**

**May my gift of service
truly be my prayer to you this day.**

Amen.

Excerpted from *Prayers for the Servants of God* by Edward M. Hays, © 1986. Used with the permission of the publisher, all rights reserved. Forest of Peace Publishing, an imprint of Ave Maria Press, PO Box 428, Notre Dame, IN 46556-0428.



CANTOR

Continued from page four

means being involved in the entire life of the community, in relationship, not giving up on them. Sometimes we need to step back and be willing to be led by others. Remember, we all have the same need to feel valued and worthy. We all hope that, if we were absent, we would be missed. All need to feel included, accepted, safe, comfortable, confident, and challenged at the same time. This is what it means to love and be loved. This is what a parish congregation should experience. This is what we sing about when we worship.

THE CANTOR AND THE LITURGY

There are a few essentials that cantors must embrace in order to bring this vision to life. We need to be ministers of hospitality through our presence and through taking time to rehearse with the community. We should be well prepared, leading with humility and confidence, not settling for mediocrity and not giving up, especially when it seems easy to do so. We need to proclaim our sung prayers with passion, honoring this privilege of public praying and honoring each other in the liturgical assembly. Finally, we always need to embrace Jesus Christ—yesterday, today, and forever. Then we will be centered not in ourselves but in the “we,” the entire Body of Christ called to worship and sing in Spirit and truth. ☪

NPM SUMMER INSTITUTES ESPECIALLY FOR SINGERS

- Cantor Express: 4 locations
- Choir Director Institute
- Music with Children

Call today for a brochure—(240) 247-3000—or register online: www.npm.org.

SMALL & RURAL PARISH

Continued from page eight

Eucharist is central to a community’s experience of the full Paschal Mystery. When the Eucharist is not celebrated each Sunday, the liturgical leadership must take special care of how the community does celebrate on the Lord’s Day. The cantor—often one of the few lay ministers with the skills readily available to lead prayer—is uniquely qualified to assist the community in Sunday celebrations without Eucharist. In order to assist effectively, cantors should study and understand the ritual text *Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest*.⁷

THE TASKS AHEAD

This brief look at some of the tasks entrusted to the cantor suggests that the challenges unique and common to rural parishes find some solutions in the responsibilities entrusted to the cantor. The tasks ahead for cantors in these parishes are to recognize the challenges and ponder the suggested responses as they seek solutions for their community. ☪

Notes

1. Diana Kodner, *Handbook for Cantors* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1997), 5.

2. *Agenda for the Small Church: A Handbook for Rural Ministry* (Des Moines: The National Catholic Rural Life Conference, 1998), 22–23.

3. Shannon Jung, et. al., *Rural Ministry: The Shape of the Renewal to Come* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 98.

4. *Ibid.*, 99–108.

5. Joseph Molnar, ed., *Agricultural Change: Consequences for Southern Farms and Rural Communities* (Boulder: Westview, 1996).

6. James Dallen, *The Dilemma of Priestless Sundays* (Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1994), 133–141.

7. The 1994 edition of this ritual has recently been revised and sent to Rome for approval (*recognitio*). This would be a great time to begin a study of this rite.

ABOUT THE WRITERS

Barbara Esposito Ilacqua is currently on the music staff of the Cathedral of St. Thomas More, Arlington, Virginia, as soprano section leader and cantor. She is also the soprano section leader of the Grammy-winning Washington Chorus, Washington, DC.

Rev. R. Gabriel Pivarnik, OP, a Dominican priest studying for his doctorate in sacramental theology at The Catholic University of America, is a member of the NPM Standing Committee for Clergy.

Mary Lynn Pleczkowski, associate director of music ministries at St. James Parish, Sewickley, Pennsylvania, edits *The Liturgical Singer* and serves on the faculty for Cantor Express. She is also the vice chair of the NPM Standing Committee for Cantors.

Lori True, director of music and liturgy for the Church of St. Margaret Mary in Golden Valley, Minnesota, serves as the associate director of Music Ministry Alive!, a liturgical music formation program for high school and college youth. A teacher, workshop presenter, and recording artist, Lori is also a published composer with GIA Publications.

Lou Valenzi currently serves as the director of music and liturgy at St. James Parish, Sewickley, Pennsylvania. A professional singer and actor, Lou is also a composer, teacher, and clinician in the Pittsburgh area.

Tony Varas, currently chair of the NPM Council’s Finance Committee, serves the Diocese of Great Falls-Billings as director of worship and Christian initiation. He has also served as a parish liturgy and music director.

THE LITURGICAL SINGER

is published quarterly by the National Association of Pastoral Musicians
962 Wayne Avenue, Suite 210
Silver Spring, MD 20910-4461
Phone: (240) 247-3000 • Fax: (240) 247-3001
E-mail: NPMSING@npm.org
Web: www.npm.org
Publisher: Dr. J. Michael McMahon
Editor: Ms. Mary Lynn Pleczkowski

Volume 5 Number 2 • April 2004

UNIQUE ISSUES FOR CANTORS

TONY VARAS

In the United States, the experience of parish ranges from large urban settings to small rural communities. While many of the opportunities and challenges of parish life are the same regardless of size or location, there are some unique aspects of a small rural community that offer particular opportunities and challenges to liturgical leadership, especially to cantors.

Since the Second Vatican Council, the role of cantor has grown and changed. The role in today's parish is to "lead moments of worship with solo song; share in proclaiming the word of God, particularly as psalmist in the liturgy of the word; teach the assembly its songs, refrains, and acclamations; and animate the sung worship of the assembly."¹ The *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* tells us that "it is necessary that the psalmist have the talent for singing and an ability for correct pronunciation and diction" (102). The same document emphasizes that the cantor's role is to "sustain the people in the singing" (103). These descriptions of the craft seem to work for any parish situation—large, small, or rural. So what makes the task of the cantor different in a small rural community?

When a cantor serves such a community, the liturgical role does not change, certainly, but *how* the role is fulfilled is unique. Isolation, economic concerns, and insufficient number of ordained clergy are challenges common to rural parishes.² The way in which the cantor responds to these issues may nurture the liturgical life of the assembly and

allow the cantor to function as a conduit for God's transforming love.

ISOLATION

It is not uncommon in some rural dioceses for the closest parish to be a sixty-to-eighty mile drive away. Long distances and difficult winter travel conditions mean limited contact with leadership from other parishes. The same circumstances limit the availability of diocesan office personnel or regular contact with a local NPM chapter. So a rural cantor must take added responsibility to serve as a conduit between the local community and the larger church.

The rural cantor can help to break down the sense of isolation by staying in contact with music leaders of neighboring parishes and making a special effort to attend regional gatherings of parish musicians, which will provide the cantor with experiences to share with other leaders in the parish who might not be able to attend. The rural cantor can also stay in touch with neighboring musicians by e-mail: The sharing of wisdom and support will facilitate the education and formation of the rural cantor; it will also be a chance to provide a link that reduces the sense of isolation experienced by those in many rural parishes.

ECONOMIC CONCERNS

Whether a parish is urban or rural, certainly, financial needs most often exceed available funds. But additional economic concerns in a rural setting may become part of a cantor's concern and ministry. Many rural parish families experience pronounced "boom and bust" economic cycles.³ These result in inter-generational economic stress⁴ as well high levels of depression and despair found in rural areas.⁵ So, how do these realities of parishioners' lives affect the rural cantor's task?

Since it is likely that the rural

cantor already has relationships with people experiencing these conditions, it is a matter of increasing sensitivity to the situation. The insight gained from this added sensitivity might be used to influence music selection, performance style, and overall approach, since ritual music will have an impact on these conditions. In other words, when the song of the assembly is fully expressed, it will ultimately lead to conversion of the assembly. Then, as the assembly experiences conversion, its song shapes a vision of the future.

Particularly in a difficult rural economic environment, it is fundamental for the cantor to know the psalms well, for they express the fullness of human passion. In a unique way, the psalms that are part of the liturgy provide moments when human concerns and God's concerns have the opportunity to meet. While there are other moments in the liturgy at which this meeting can occur, it would be tragic to lose this key moment entrusted to the cantor. The cantor, therefore, selects psalm settings and enables the rest of the assembly in praying them with an eye to the experiences witnessed by the cantor's involvement in the lives of the assembly being served.

CLERGY SHORTAGE

The shrinking number of ordained clergy means that an increasing number of communities celebrate Eucharist only once or twice a month. Clearly, there is a diversity of views about the causes for the shortage and how to address the issue. While discussion of the topic is interesting and essential, the rural cantor is faced with the current consequences of the problem and has an important task to assume in responding to this pastoral challenge.

A local community's spirituality is affected when it cannot celebrate Sunday Eucharist each week,⁶ for the

Continued on page seven