



NPM Wichita Noteworthy

NPM Convention

I awakened one morning last week to find another chapter newsletter in my email inbox. It was a little distressing to read that newsletter because it was a short note from the Chapter Director and contained negative news. Because of the pandemic, because the chapter events had all but ceased, because choirs were not singing, and because the chapter had nothing to report, that was their last newsletter for the time being.

I have always enjoyed reading that newsletter, but how sad that the feeling of defeat was handed to them. Personally, parts of me agree with their logic. It has been a tough year. Our chapter has planned events and we have had to keep pushing them out. We have not been able to gather. Our choirs have shut down (thankfully in-person Mass began in May!) so it could have been easy for us to have the same feeling.

For a while I have been thinking about what we could present in a virtual format, a logical option for the current time and conditions. Since we often learn from each other I reached out to the NPM Chapter Directors Committee Co-Chair to share my concerns. She was an enormous help and provided some ideas of using some of the NPM Convention material for short chapter meetings. Viola! What a great idea. I was not able to attend the convention this year, even after it switched to a virtual meeting, but I heard great comments about speakers from our chapter members who did attend.

I had an informative discussion with the NPM Office and was able to get access to some of the recorded convention material. As well, I learned that NPM will be posting some additional material for members such as virtual choir performances (something I'd like our chapter to record!).

With that in mind, keep an eye out for more information about some virtual chapter meetings. I think our first event will be more social in nature – that is a virtual happy hour where you bring your own refreshments (include your pet(s) if you want) and we just check in with each other. I think we will then navigate to the convention material and have some discussion questions

You “met” Carol Nigrelli in our last *Noteworthy*. Carol is a newer member to our chapter moving here from Omaha with her husband Craig. Carol is a retired journalist. The chapter recently asked her to assume the Communications Chair for Wichita NPM. She enthusiastically agreed to do so. So got put right to work and has provided an article in the last newsletter (wasn't that a great article she provided?) and has written a member email. Do read further because Carol has provided a part II to her August submission that you will also enjoy. Thank you so much Carol for sharing your gifts with the board.

We are still looking for someone to take over the Hospitality Committee from Rosalie Goebel. If you are interested, please contact director@npmwichita.org.

With the addition of Carol Nigrelli to the board, there has been a little juggling of board duties. Christopher Dean, who so wonderfully designs our newsletter and provides a great deal of technical support to the chapter was tasked to be the



Tom Wierman,
Chapter Director



Upcoming Events

Sunday, November 22, 2020

St. Cecilia Sing

2:00—4:00 p.m.

- St. Cecilia Sing
- Musician Blessing
- Youth Musician Recognition
- Long-time Musician Recognition
- Chapter Anniversary Celebration

St. Cecilia Church

1830 W Grand

Haysville, KS 67060

Saturday, January 30, 2021

Pastoral Musician Workshop

Available Music Positions

A Catholic Chapel Musician/ Accompanist is needed to assist the Catholic Community at McConnell Air Force Base beginning October 2020. The schedule is Saturday Evening and Sunday Morning Mass and the associated rehearsals (approximately 20 hours per week). This contract has a base year and if all goes well 4 option years.

The ideal candidate will meet the following qualifications:

- 3 years of experience playing music in a tradition comparable to a Mass/Worship service
- Able to sight-read music or play by ear
- Able to play guitar, piano & organ for rehearsals and worship services.

If interested, contact:

Milena Oyarzun
milena@parliamentutors.com
 (877) 873-0511 (Office)
 (305) 619-2640 (Cell)



Technology Chair. He was previously the Communications Chair.

We still plan to hold the St. Cecilia Sing in November. So much of course depends on what COVID-19 looks like at that time. We have a small committee working to plan the event. More information will be communicated.

Choirs in the Age of Covid: Part II

A Deeper Look into What Our Churches Are--Or Aren't--Singing

by Carol Crissey Nigrelli

When will this end?

And what will the liturgical music landscape look like once COVID loosens its grip on our personal, professional, and pastoral lives?

No one knows.

But if the current scenario holds a clue, churches in the Wichita diocese will take very different approaches to resuming full-on music-- just as wide a range as we experience now.

"Some parishes are singing everything, some are singing nothing," says Melissa Seiler, music director at St. Vincent de Paul in Andover. "Some are singing with cantors, some are chanting only. Every parish is deciding what they want to do."

Seeds of the divergent paths took root in May, when churches reopened. Although the Wichita diocese issued guidelines pertaining to COVID, strongly urging that choirs disband in favor of cantors and that parishioners cover their faces and adhere to social distancing rules, the guidelines were more of a suggestion than a commandment. The diocese counted on parish priests to follow through. As Father Andrew Walsh of St. Patrick Catholic Church in Kingman reasoned, "I had to use my best judgment as to what the people of my parish would be open to." He also found it hard to strike a balance between resuming music with a cantor and organ, and at the same time trying to discourage parishioners from singing.

The size and architectural style of a church also factor into the equation of what we're singing or not singing. The spacious Church of the Magdalen in Wichita, with its semicircular design, provides ample opportunity for people to stay apart. Magdalen's music director Alan Held, the world-renowned operatic bass-baritone and professor of voice at Wichita State, has been using a pared-down ensemble of about eight to 10 voices. They sing the Gloria, responsorial, acclamation, and Mass parts as well as the hymns.

"They wear masks, of course," says Held of his choir members. "We've had the same good, loyal core people since late June. I'm honored and thrilled that these people are so dedicated to what we're doing."

In contrast, St. Joseph Parish in Delano, a much smaller, rectangular church built in 1916, offers little room for social distancing with its congregational-style seating and not everyone wears a mask. Hymnals and missals disappeared from the pews months ago, but the parishioners still love to sing, which is why choir director John Probst keeps the music simple: one verse for the processional, one or two verses for the offertory, a communion song and one verse for the recessional--no sung Gloria, psalm response, acclamation, or Mass parts.

"The Mass parts are so familiar to them that it's almost an automatic response for them to sing along," says Probst, who often solo cantors up in the choir loft with an accompanist. "They don't need a hymnal. They just know it."



Yet another variation on a theme can be heard at St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, located across Central Avenue from Bishop Carroll Catholic High School. Shortly after the pandemic began, St. Francis traded hymn-singing for composer Adam Bartlett's *Simple English Propers*. One cantor sings the plainchant antiphons for the entrance, offertory and communion, accompanied by organ.

"I told the cantors, 'if you think you can walk in and sing these, you can't,'" recalls music director Sister Stephanie Heskamp, referring to the complexity of the Bartlett works. "When we first started them six months ago, I didn't like it. But I know now they can be beautiful, but the cantor has to make them beautiful."

When the church asked Sister Stephanie to implement the antiphons, her sadness at the change stemmed from her nearly 50 years of shepherding the music ministry at St. Francis as director and organist.

"Now that we don't have choirs, I find it quite depressing because I'm not sure I'll get anybody back," Sr. Stephanie says quietly. "I've tried through the years to get people to sing, and now we're telling them they can't sing."

Farther west in Wichita, no one is singing at one of the largest churches in the diocese. St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church at 119th and Central has had no music for weeks. Nothing. Not even organ music.

"This has all come about since the second wave of the pandemic started in July and the church decided to shut the music down completely. Before that I was making worship aids, and we had a cantor," says music director David Downing, whose newly-ordained son Luke became parochial vicar at St. Francis in June.

The big question for SEAS now is whether to order missals for next year, at a cost of about \$6,000.

"We only used the missals for three months because of the COVID," Downing says. "I don't see any reason why we can't use them again. The readings won't be the same, but we can use them for the music."

Voices are also silent at a church known diocesan-wide for its vibrant music ministry, gospel choirs, and diverse congregation--Holy Savior Catholic Church on 13th Street near Hillside. Singing helps define Holy Savior, which joyfully celebrated its new building last November. But the church recently decided singing presents too great a risk to parishioners' health. Regina Henderson, whose rich, powerful soprano has graced Wichita music circles for decades, says she was thrown for a loop.

"There's no choir, there's no cantor, no Mass parts. They're only doing entrance, offertory, communion, and sending forth and it's all instrumental," she says.

The opportunity to cantor the 4:00 pm Sunday Mass at Holy Savior provided the one sure thing Henderson could count on to make her feel like herself.

"I'm a little lost," she admits. "It's the first time in my entire life that I haven't sung with a choir, been a cantor, in an ensemble, a trio, or a glee club. So when they said, 'no singing,' I just went *aarghhh*, because everything else has been taken away, too."

Why has everything been taken away? Because from the very beginning of the pandemic, credible case studies labeled choirs "super-spreaders" of the respiratory virus. That characterization is making more and more musicians like Alan Held bristle, because there's very little *recent* data about both how COVID is transmitted, and how to bring the Arts community back together.

"It was a little insulting not just to singers but to instrumentalists to be labeled super-spreaders. The Arts were also labeled as the last thing to be allowed back," says Held.

Speaking with the fervor of a preacher, Held continued, "No one has been hit harder in any industry than the Arts during all this. It is crippling our ability to have beauty."

And so we wait. And hope for the day when we can make a joyful noise...together.
