

Music in the International English-speaking parish

Initial observations

Since my arrival in Luxembourg in September 2012, I have been pondering the challenges posed in developing the liturgy, and in particular the music during Mass. I have identified several factors which we have to take into account, and several principles I believe we should observe.

1. We are English-speaking, but from many different countries and cultural backgrounds, with often widely varying musical traditions: we have no common repertoire of hymns or Mass settings
2. There are considerable numbers of people who join us for Mass each week who are not English-speakers at all, but whom we would like to be able to join in what we sing
3. We are still getting used to the new translation of the Mass, and we are not yet familiar with musical settings for this new format
4. Our community is gathered from every part of the Grand Duchy and beyond, and people make considerable sacrifices to be present at Mass; combined with the fact that people often travel on business or to their country of origin, musical rehearsals are very difficult to organise
5. Our departure from Hollerich marked the beginning of a time of adjustment and transition, and also offers us an opportunity to evaluate and to plan afresh with regards to all aspects of our Sunday celebration of Mass

Principles — my (*negotiable*) opinion

1. Insofar as possible, our singing at Mass is to be participative: accessible to as wide a range of people as possible
2. All aspects of our worship should convey a sense of dignity, reverence, joy, involvement and prayerfulness
3. We value both the old and traditional hymns and liturgical music, and the modern
4. The music each Sunday, as an integral part of the liturgy, is chosen after reflection on the readings and prayers of the day, and with respect to the season
5. Given the challenges outlined above, it would seem that the best common repertoire we can establish would be to have several Mass settings (Kyrie/Lord have mercy, Gloria, Sanctus/Holy Holy, Memorial Acclamation, Doxology and Great Amen, Agnus Dei/Lamb of God)
6. That we seek to draw in willing and able singers and musicians to form a musical core who can then encourage and assist the wider congregation in their participation
7. That care is taken not just in the choice of music, but in the preparation and rehearsal

8. That we are generous with each other in accepting, welcoming and participating in music at Mass which might not be our own preference

A proposed strategy

- a. With all of the above in mind, and after observation, consultation and experimentation, I have devised and begun implementing an outline strategy for our music; this I present firstly in terms of a vision of what I think would best serve our community, working within our limitations, but aspiring to our best; and secondly, I propose practical steps towards achieving this vision.
- b. We have a group of musicians who rehearse and play together, again leading the congregation instrumentally and with singing, and who can provide reflective accompaniment together or individually as appropriate
- c. We have cantors who can, for example, sing the Psalm or provide a solo reflection, and can teach the congregation new music as necessary
- d. We have an organist who can play hymns and provide accompaniment where appropriate in the liturgy
- e. We have a group of singers, who meet informally, sit together and support the congregational singing
- f. We have a chorale/schola cantorum, a choir both support the congregation and provide their own choral pieces as appropriate. This chorale will have a director, will meet regularly for rehearsal, will be present as required on Sundays, and will plan for larger occasions (eg. Inter-community Masses)
- g. All musicians (or leaders) will meet with the priest every two or three months to plan and co-ordinate the music for the following weeks; related to this, there will be catechesis for all musicians regarding choosing appropriate music based on the readings, prayers and liturgical season
- h. The music will not be either/or (for example, organ or music group or chorale) but each week will include a combination of the most suitable given the demands of the liturgy and the availability of personnel
- i. Our music will be as accessible as possible to visitors, in terms of provision of words/musical notation/use of chants/occasional use of Latin
- j. There are additional demands on, and challenges to, our music ministry: the Messes Intercomaunautaires/Messes du Peuple de Dieu from time to time at the cathedral; our relationship with the former Paroisse Européenne, which is in the process of renegotiation; special events such as First Holy Communion and Confirmation.

What I think we need

Leader of the music group, responsible for keeping the group together, rehearsing, managing and expanding the repertoire, liaising with the parish priest

Organist, available to support and lead the liturgy in the same way as the music group, rehearsing, managing and expanding the repertoire, liaising with the parish priest

At least quarterly meetings, more frequent if necessary, to keep our strategy on track
Periodic review by the parish council (annual?) to monitor how everything is working.