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Expecting the Unexpected

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FEB 15 2012

THE SINGERS

PLANNING.....	1
CANTOR	3
POINT.....	4
COUNTER.....	5
WYD	7
FEELINGS.....	8

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

PLANNING

EXPECTING THE UNEXPECTED

R. GABRIEL PIVARNIK, OP

As a presbyter who spends most of his days teaching or in meetings, I had prepared for the implementation of the new translation of the *Missal* the same way I prepare for anything else—make a plan, put it in place, evaluate, and reassess. However, in this case, it wasn't just one plan but three. I have the unique privilege of assisting in a suburban community in Massachusetts while also living on a college campus in the context of a religious community: a parish, a campus ministry, a priory. For the latter, I was expected to drive the entire implementation of the new musical acclamations. For the campus, I was part of a team of people who were involved in planning and executing. And, in the parish, I was happily able to assist while others did the real work of preparation. So—not one story but three.

THE PARISH

I remember vividly what happened the first weekend we began using the new acclamations in the parish. It was an early fall weekend in New England: The leaves were beginning to change, and the weather was unseasonably warm. In that idyllic scene, the organist ran through the revised settings of the *Mass of Creation*. Most of the parishioners seemed unfazed. The real worry was on the faces of the organist and the presider—me. When we finally began Mass, we were both sure that everything would be fine. And it was, if you don't count the simple fact that the only noticeable mistakes were made by the organist and me. *Expect the unexpected*. The organist, who was doubling as the cantor, left out one of the verses of the *Gloria*, and I, who was attempting to help lead the acclamations, fell

IN THIS ISSUE

It seems like only yesterday that we were anxiously waiting the unveiling of the changes to the English translation of the *Roman Missal*, but now, with two months of using the new texts behind us, we are preparing to enter the Lenten Season.

While the process has not been easy for everyone—and even frustrating for many—so far, it seems that everyone is surviving and our assemblies are managing to adjust. What are you hearing? How are your assemblies doing with these new words and songs? In this issue you will see some of the thoughts and feelings of our own members as posted on our Facebook page. See if your thoughts are among them.

Now it's time to focus on a different kind of preparation: We need to be prepared for our ministry. As usual, I could not be more proud of the authors we have writing for this issue! Rev. R. Gabriel Pivarnik, OP, writes our cover article. Gabriel tells us that, “in the midst of human weakness and frailty, it was the music that gave us a certain step and a surer footing.”

Our “Point/Counterpoint” articles are by two quite accomplished musicians. Marek Rachelski and Christopher Reames share their perspectives on preparation as music director and cantor—honest thoughts that I know you will find helpful.

Our final two articles are written by John Angotti and Katherine LeDuc. John shares his experiences during World Youth Day 2011, and Katherine shares some unexpected situations that she has encountered throughout her music ministry.

May God continue to bless you during these new and challenging times ahead! While the “big unveiling” has occurred, our work is not done. Our assemblies need us to be ready, so we pray these words typically prayed during Advent yet so profound at any time of the year: “Prepare the way of the Lord, make straight his paths” (Matthew 3:3).

In Peace,
Mary Lynn Pleczkowski
Editor

right back into the older version of the *Sanctus* without even thinking. The people remained unfazed. One parishioner commented at the end of Mass: "What was all that stuff about new acclamations? I didn't notice anything different." As the weeks progressed, though, something very noticeable happened. The assemblies were singing with renewed fervor. When November 27 came, the easiest part of the transition was the music, because they had already learned it. As the weeks have progressed, it has been precisely their familiarity with the music that has made the transition with the new text easier. Now as we prepare for Lent, there is a renewed sense of purpose and intention in the sung acclamations, and the people remain undaunted in the face of change.

THE CAMPUS COMMUNITY

Early in the summer, the pastoral team in campus ministry put together a roll-out plan for the new translation: Teach the choir the new acclamations early in September, introduce the acclamations to the community in October, highlight the new translation in the weeks before its implementation in November. Clear, manageable, and concise. After all, we basically had a few minutes before each Mass to get the attention of the students, teach them the acclamations, and hope that they would plug in to something new and different. In the process, perhaps, we forgot how resilient young people are. *Expect the unexpected.* The choir picked up the new acclamations almost immediately—within three practice sessions they had learned Steve Janco's *Mass of Wisdom* and were singing it as if they had been doing so their entire lives. As it was introduced to the students at Masses, they too showed an amazing ability to appropriate what was new. And then, of course, there was the major blip in our plan—on November 27, the students were returning to campus from Thanksgiving break. Half of the Masses that weekend were canceled—and the ones that were celebrated were done without music, since many of the students in the choirs were still on their way back to school. So the big "roll out" happened during the second week of Advent, in the last week of classes, when students were tired and stressed, bleary-eyed, and exhausted. But the things they knew cold were the sung acclamations for Mass. Sure, there was a missed "under my roof" and many an errant "and also with you," but the singing was part of their ritual vocabulary and psyche. Their voices filled the chapel as the church echoed the need to *make straight a pathway for the Lord*. But as exams ended and the students filed away, we were afraid that the experience of sung liturgy with the community in "actual time" would be too little. *Expect the unexpected.* We were wrong. Even after a break, the students returned ready to sing and to engage. In some ways, the music has been their one constant.

THE RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY

By far the easiest transition to the new sung acclamations should have occurred in the religious community of which I am a part. Liturgically adept and used to communal prayer several times a day, the community would have ample practice with the sung acclamations before the actual implementation. Alas, that never happened. *Expect the unexpected.* The community of approximately forty men has ten cantors and four organists. By all accounts, we are extremely blessed with the wealth of musical talent that we have. There was little willingness, though, to change what we had been doing for decades in the community. The prevailing attitude was that the minor change of the *Sanctus* and the new memorial acclamations would not warrant full-scale revision. And since the *Gloria* would not be needed much in Advent, we could rely on simple tones to chant that text. And then the unexpected happened. The Monday before Thanksgiving, a beloved and well-respected member of the community passed away. Because the Sunday Mass celebration in the priory only occurs when students are on campus (many of the priests are assisting parishes on Sundays), the first Mass that the community would be celebrating with the new translation would now be a funeral Mass on Monday. Moreover, the presider of the funeral Mass would be from another province, and the vast majority of the people gathered for the funeral would be from outside the community. Immediately, we went to "Plan B" and decided to use the revised settings of the *Mass of Creation* so that the largest number of people could participate in the sung acclamations. Ironically, despite our lack of immediate preparation, this community—of the three that I describe here—has now embraced the most adaptation and change. *Expect the unexpected.* Since Advent began, we have sung four different settings of the Mass and a host of new memorial acclamations, and we've discovered a renewed sense of our communal commitment to sung liturgy.

IN COMMON

In all three of these communities there was a common thread. In the midst of human weakness and frailty, it was the music that gave us a certain step and a surer footing. In the midst of fatigue and weariness, it was the music which allowed us to rest secure in our prayer. In the midst of the unexpected, it was the music that guided us and united us in prayer that we might enter into the mystery we are celebrating. In the end, it was the music that taught us to *expect the unexpected.* ☪

