

# Ministering with Easter Joy



Photo © John Zich

To minister with joy, we need to be healthy, rested, spiritually centered, and well-prepared both musically and liturgically.



Photo © John Zich

With proper organization, music directors can provide ministers with sufficient time to practice so that what the assembly hears is prayed and sung well.

## Eric J. Bermani

A wise pastor once told me, “Eric, you’re worth more to me alive than dead.” Crude? Yes. Truthful? Perhaps. Funny? I must admit, some friends found it humorous. Pastoral? On the face of it perhaps not, but just underneath the surface, certainly and without a doubt, yes. The sentence has stuck with me since it was first uttered. This pastor and I were ministers in a large parish in the Archdiocese of Boston with a significantly sized music ministry and where the full celebration of the liturgy was given highest priority. The parish was constantly abuzz with four choral ensembles and six weekend liturgies, in addition to numerous sacramental services. The pastor’s intention, albeit frank, was to remind me to take care of myself to save myself (and, therefore, the pastoral staff and music ministry) from burnout, the too common ailment afflicting musicians and clergy alike.

To minister with joy, we need to be healthy, rested, spiritually centered, and well prepared both musically and liturgically. Ultimately, the responsibility for each of these falls on us. If we have not taken the necessary steps to help ourselves, we are not going to be effective ministers to those entrusted to our care, namely, our fellow music ministers, pastoral colleagues, and, most importantly, the assembly. If we are not careful, we will minister without the joy that we could or should have.

Maintaining energy during the course of a year is, undeniably, a challenge. That the date of Easter changes from year to year presents a challenge in itself during that season, especially when we think of sustaining energy, strength, stamina, and focus,

not to mention the intricate musical demands and the necessity to minister with joy! An example of a perfect storm of sorts would be Easter 2014. Easter was so late that, for many colleagues and parishes, the date somewhat threw a monkey wrench into everything on the other side. At the cathedral in Manchester, New Hampshire, the choirs were initially pleased with the long period between Christmas and Lent, but on the flip side of the coin, they then had to contend with a later celebration of the Solemnity of the Body and Blood of Christ, which, in many parishes, also marks the time when choirs go on summer hiatus. Here, this translated to about ten weeks of non-stop parish and diocesan liturgies from Easter Sunday through the celebration of Corpus Christi, plus an additional week since the Solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul fell on a Sunday. All of this being said, it is vitally important that music ministers are able to continually serve the assembly with faithfulness, joy, energy, and enthusiasm, no matter the date of Easter. Maintaining that forward motion and joy is no easy task, but I hope to share some ideas and insights that may make the journey easier for you and for those with whom you minister.

## EARLY PREPARATION IS KEY

It is not by accident that Easter Time is a long liturgical season. During this time the Church extends her glad and joyful paschal celebration for seven full weeks, ending fifty days later on Pentecost Sunday. We all know that the Triduum, culminating in the Easter Vigil and the Solemnity of Easter Sunday, is the high point of the liturgical year. How many of us fully realize that the Easter celebration is so important that the Church



Photo © John Zich

Celebrating the Fifty Days as one great Sunday, singing the same settings for the Gloria, Eucharistic Prayer acclamations, Lamb of God, and Alleluia from the Easter Vigil through the Seventh Sunday of Easter, removes some of the stress from the season.

continues her celebration for seven days following Easter Sunday? These days, or the Easter Octave, comprise Easter week, and each day is a solemnity of high rank, employing the Gloria and the double “alleluia” sung at the dismissal. This week of weeks is so important that the Church multiplies it seven times seven, creating our seven weeks of Easter. So, as you can see, the entire season is symbolic in length since, at its core, is a season of seven times seven days.

As we sing in Responsorial Psalm 98: “Sing joyfully to the Lord, you lands! Break into song; sing praise!” A good first step to maintain stamina and joyful ministry is to be adequately prepared for Easter well before Ash Wednesday. We should also have an idea as to what resources exist to assist us and our colleagues. A good rule of thumb suggests that your Lenten, Triduum, and Easter season preparation and planning be complete by the end of January. Be as organized as possible: type everything in a clear format and include all dates, times, and music selections. Distribute copies electronically and by hard copy to everyone in the music ministry and pastoral staff as soon as your preparation is complete. Take advantage of your parish’s website by asking the webmaster to design a music ministry section where you can post a PDF file of your preparations.

Though such preparations might appear to be a lot of work at first, it is important that music ministers understand the time commitment well in advance. Such an understanding is essential, especially for those parishes that may have seasonal choirs or ensembles that do not rehearse weekly. With this advance knowledge, the individual music ministers can then go through their music, have ample time to organize their binders, and perhaps listen to some pieces on the Internet or a CD-ROM.

The more organized the director is, the more organized the music ministry is, and the smoother the ministry runs. Elimination of confusion and angst means less stress for you and

the entire music ministry. If your cantors are responsible for chanting the prescribed sequences, be sure to give advance copies of the *Victimae paschali laudes* (Easter Sunday Sequence) and *Veni Sancte Spiritus* (Pentecost Sunday Sequence), so they have plenty of time to prepare. Likewise, preparation material should be given in advance to the person who will sing the *Exsultet* at the Easter Vigil and other chanted dialogues for the Triduum. All of this music may be found in *The Roman Missal*. Parish musicians must be proactive in this area: don’t be intimidated to look at the Missal! Make copies of the chants pertaining to the deacon and priest, and distribute the music to them in advance. Thankfully, MP3 files can be found on the Internet that can assist with learning the parts. Assemble and share with your staff a list of resources designed to help with learning and singing the chants prayerfully and musically.

A great asset for understanding and learning to sing the chants is *Essential Presidential Prayers and Texts: A Roman Missal Study Edition and Workbook*, by Daniel J. Merz and Abbot

Marcel Rooney, OSB, published by Liturgy Training Publications (LTP). Supporting this user-friendly resource is the CD-ROM *Learning the Chants of the Missal: Part II, Essential Presidential Prayers*, in which J. Michael Joncas chants each of the presidential prayers, including the *Ecce Lignum Crucis* from Good Friday, the *Exsultet*, and the Blessing of Baptismal Water. These resources may motivate ministers to revisit these chants.

Use the calendar to your advantage. Ministering joyfully requires us to be constantly mindful that we work in collaboration with a host of others. As much as we dislike having music thrust onto us for funerals or weddings, we must not throw these important texts onto our liturgical colleagues the week before the Triduum. They, like all of us, deserve the right to practice in order to prepare themselves. Most importantly, the assembly deserves the right to pray and hear chants that are sung well. Being cognizant of others’ needs will enable everyone to minister with joy.

## CELEBRATING AS ONE “GREAT SUNDAY”

The celebration of Easter should be viewed similarly to the celebration of the Triduum, for which there is one liturgy during three days. The Fifty Days are celebrated as one feast day, the “great Sunday.”<sup>1</sup> This “great Sunday” provides us with much continuity, which from the pastoral musician’s view, is a great blessing. Why not maintain much of the same music for the entire season? Doing so might require some catechesis (especially when advocating for the prolonged use of the rite for sprinkling) for the assembly and pastoral staff, but it is well worth the effort.<sup>2</sup>

Instead of introducing a new set of acclamations during this period, sing what is already familiar to the assembly and make every attempt to use the same settings from the Easter Vigil through the Seventh Sunday of Easter. Utilizing the same rite for sprinkling or *Vidi aquam*, *Gloria*, *Alleluia*, *Eucharistic Prayer*

acclamations (Sanctus, Mystery of Faith, and Great Amen), and Lamb of God or *Agnus Dei* will help to maintain the concept of one “great Sunday.”

These are days of great importance and of heightened solemnity. As *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* suggests, parishes should follow the principle of progressive solemnity. When this principle is employed, ritual music is added and more festive settings of hymns and service music are used when the Church is celebrating feasts and solemnities. In other words, the way we celebrate Midnight Mass is different than how we celebrate the Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time. Both celebrations should be of good quality, but one will have a heightened solemnity.

Easter Time may be a good time to revisit and explore the possibility of utilizing the Entrance and Communion Antiphons. Look to the many collections and resources available, in both chant and contemporary genres, to assist in the implementation of these texts into the parish’s liturgies. For the assembly, music need not be complex since simple (but not trite) can be beautiful, moving, and inviting. Just as we utilize Christmas carols from Christmas Eve through the Baptism of the Lord, so should we sing our Easter hymns from the Easter Vigil through the Ascension or Seventh Sunday in Easter. Be sure to maintain hymns with “alleluias” and texts rich with Easter themes throughout the entire season. The same concept is true for choral anthems or solos.

Should you need assistance in preparing this much music in advance, it is helpful to realize that many resources are available online to assist in your preparation. Be sure to check out your local cathedral’s website, your diocesan office for worship, and the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops’ Committee for Divine Worship (<http://www.usccb.org/prayer-and-worship/liturgical-year/triduum/index.cfm>). Also, look at the planning pages of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians ([www.npm.org](http://www.npm.org)) and CanticaNova Publications ([www.canticanova.org](http://www.canticanova.org)) in addition to LTP’s *Sourcebook for Sundays, Seasons, and Weekdays 2015* and the liturgical journals to which you subscribe. Maintaining festive and vibrant choral, ritual, and congregational music throughout Easter Time, as well as developing a working understanding of the liturgical theology of the season, will energize you, the music ministry, and the assembly. By the Seventh Sunday of Easter, the words of St. Augustine should ring true to everyone in your parish: “We are an Easter people and ‘Alleluia’ is our song!”

## TAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF

Regardless of the size of your parish, the musical demands of Triduum and Easter are considerable and, realistically, can be overwhelming alongside other professional, family, and personal responsibilities. Therefore, it is important to carve into your schedule time for yourself. This personal time could take on a variety of possibilities: begin your day by taking a few minutes to deepen your spirituality by meditating, reading a spiritual book, or participating in daily Mass. You might also want to consider attending your diocesan Chrism Mass (especially if you have never done so), praying the Liturgy of the Hours during the Triduum, basking in the glory of various musical masterpieces, exercising outside in the newly arrived spring weather, treating



Photo © John Zich

Only when we pray and understand the text can we bring it to life musically.

yourself to a massage or other fun activity, or simply enjoying time with friends and colleagues. For example, I have a colleague who, each Good Friday night, watches Mel Gibson’s *Passion of the Christ* and listens to J.S. Bach’s *Oster-Oratorium* (Easter Oratorio, BWV 249) and the Easter portion of Handel’s *Messiah* during Easter Week. He truly looks forward to this annual ritual. A tradition that has developed for me is to have dinner with a good friend immediately following the Chrism Mass on Tuesday of Holy Week.

I know of others who gather for a great paschal brunch on the Saturday of the Second Sunday of Easter. The woman who hosts this small gathering of liturgical musicians has been doing so for close to twenty years. Imagine that, two decades of serving brunch to her fellow ministers. Surely, long ago, she recognized a need for her and for her friends, and what a blessing that it has turned into an event that everyone anticipates. Do not forget about those in your music ministry! Why not try to organize a trip to the cathedral for the Chrism Mass or attend the Office of Tenebrae? And, if the schedule allows, why not cancel the choir and ensemble rehearsals for the week of Easter? The music ministers certainly will need the rest. The music for the Second Sunday of Easter should be similar to that of Easter Sunday and this little break will help them recharge for the weeks ahead. These traditions and considerations help with maintaining focus, retaining energy, and encouraging joyful ministry.

## PRAY THE MUSIC

Another effective way to minister with joy is to meditate on some of the music your assemblies sing. We choose music for our assemblies that is inviting, melodic, prayerful, and beautiful. Do we take the time to pray and evaluate our texts? Only when coupled with a theologically sound, rich text does the music draw our assemblies deeper into the mystery of the Eucharist. Like other choir directors, I advise choristers to sit down, read, and pray the scriptural texts. Only when we fully understand the text, can

we bring it to life through music. How many of us allow ourselves to be formed and nurtured by the music that we are providing for our assemblies? A Latin maxim addresses the centrality of worship in our lives: *Lex orandi, lex credendi, lex vivendi* or the law of prayer is the law of belief that determines how we live. I keep a hymnal next to my chair and will pray a text to help me through a difficult or trying moment. For my project here and, despite my push for alleluias and music with an Easter theme, I am drawn to the text of Henry Van Dyke's "Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee" (1852–1933). For pastoral musicians, it contains gems and pearls of wisdom we can use to minister with Easter joy. This hymn references "God of glory," "Lord of love," and "Giver of immortal gladness" as it asks that sin and sadness be melted away. It is hard to be anything but joyful as the hymn exclaims the works of the Almighty: "flowery meadow, flashing sea, chanting bird and flowing fountain" that call us to rejoice.

Do the images of this hymn that portray God's goodness, forgiveness, and blessing bring joy to you? If Christ is our center, do we allow him to melt our clouds of sin and sadness? Do we let him drive away our doubts, fear, and darkness? All of creation and, therefore each one of us, is called to rejoice in the saving power of God. We are called to love each other as Christ loved us. We are called to raise our voices together in a mighty hymn of praise and bounded by love. It would not take much work for each of us to find a hymn that has a similar text. Why not sit down with it and make it your prayer? Would something as simple as this make a difference in your ministry? And, if I may, since every Sunday is a celebration of the Easter sacrifice and Paschal Mystery, should we settle with confining our joy to the seven weeks of Easter, or can we find ways to expand our Easter joy throughout the year so it encompasses our entire ministry?

## CONCLUSION

So how do you minister with Easter joy? Such ministry will vary, but among the common threads are the following:

- spiritually centering your ministry
- organization
- musical and liturgical preparation
- conveying plans and preparations early and effectively
- communicating with musical and liturgical colleagues and offering various support and resources as needed
- mindfulness that we minister in collaboration with others and are all servants of the community
- during the busier times of the parish's liturgical season (namely, the Triduum and Easter), taking time to recharge your batteries in a way that suits you and your loved ones



Photo © John Zich

Taking time out for yourself for prayer, socializing, and recreation is important to maintain a joyful spirit through the Triduum and Easter.

- allowing music ministers some time immediately after Easter to refresh themselves as well
- taking parish music ministers to your local Chrism Mass
- Treating the Easter season as one "great Sunday"
- utilizing the same core of music to enable everyone to pray the music and enter into the richness and depths of the rites
- in a pastoral way, taking opportunities to catechize the community about the liturgical seasons and its musical demands
- realizing that every Sunday is indeed a celebration of Easter

- reflecting and meditating upon scriptural and sacred texts

The vocation of the pastoral musician often requires us to place ourselves second to the needs of our fellow music ministers and our assembly. We are called to give of ourselves for multiple hours on weekends, holidays, and weeknights. The challenge for many is how to endure and meet the demands of the parish in a prayerful, professional, musical, and joyful way when coupled with the demands of professional and family life. I hope that those who find themselves in this struggle might benefit from some of these insights. The tools, capabilities, and potential are already within you to minister with Easter joy. ♦

## Notes

1. Cf. *Universal Norms for the Liturgical Year and the Calendar*, 22.

2. A resource that should be on everyone's shelf is the Circular Letter entitled *Paschale Solemnitatis*, issued by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments in 1988.

---

ERIC J. BERMANI is the music director for the Diocese of Manchester, New Hampshire, and director of music and organist at the Cathedral of Saint Joseph. He received a BM in organ performance from the Boston Conservatory of Music, an MA in church music and liturgy from Saint Joseph College, Rensselaer, Indiana, and is working toward a ThD in liturgical praxis and church music at the Boston University School of Theology.

## At [www.PastoralLiturgy.org](http://www.PastoralLiturgy.org)

Find and share this article with parish staff and the liturgy committee at the following URL:  
<http://www.pastoralliturgy.org/resources/MinisteringWithEasterJoy.pdf>.