

Notes from the Console

By Gregory Eaton

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It has been my privilege to serve as Director of Music and Organist of St. Ann & the Holy Trinity for the last 21 years. During that time, through good times and not-so-good times, I have tried to remain true to my mission to bring to the parish music that illuminates the Gospel and fosters new and deeper understanding of our relationship with the God who has redeemed us, and also to offer music for the wider community of Brooklyn Heights and New York City. To the extent that I have succeeded in these endeavors, I am grateful for the opportunity to do so. Where I have failed, I appreciate the indulgence and forgiveness that I hope and believe has been offered.

My main function at the parish has been to supply the music integral to liturgy and to expand upon the offerings available to St. Ann's. In that regard, I am very grateful to all of the choral singers, both professional and volunteer, who have sung faithfully for the many hundreds of services I have led in the church. The talents of these people are easily taken for granted, but it is their dedication that has made the music at St. Ann's a special part of our worship life. My gratitude to these singers is too deep for words to convey. In addition, we have been blessed over the years with many fine instrumentalists who have contributed greatly to the music program. For several years, we were able to have a children's choir, which had been a missing component of life at St. Ann's for some time. I treasure the contributions of all of the children who sang with me, as well as the parents who helped to keep our efforts on track.

I hope that the congregation has found the music program to be moving, thought-provoking, and enlightening. Because of the ways in which it can express thought and feeling that go beyond words, music is an integral facet of our understanding of God. Without it, we are like people asked to look for the pink flower in a black-and-white photograph. With it, aspects of the faith that cannot be otherwise expressed can be made plain, or at least be brought closer to our understanding through the emotions expressed in well-written and well-presented use in the liturgy. It has always been my express effort to make sure that the musical selections of the day were not only appropriate to the readings and liturgical theme, but also might lead to new thinking about the ideas presented in familiar readings. If any of you have found this to be the case, then I am satisfied.

When I began at St. Ann's in 1993, nearly one third of the organ was not playing, and the remainder of the instrument was in serious danger of failure. Though it was never defined as part of my job description, I decided to do what I could to raise funds to make necessary repairs, knowing all the time that it would be a major uphill effort. However, I also knew that the music program of the parish would be seriously compromised if the organ reached the point of complete failure. It was recognized by some in the parish that the instrument was a major component in what might draw people to St. Ann's, but few were aware of how compromised it had become over the years. If I might say so, it really did not sound very good in 1993. It was difficult to get the effort started, especially as I was part-time at St. Ann's and working two additional jobs at the same time. In my first six years in the parish, we raised a total of just over

\$45,000, a rate of fundraising that was not nearly fast enough to stop, much less reverse, the rate of age-related decay of the instrument.

In early 1999, it was announced that the parish was looking for a 1/4-time Parish Administrator. I made the proposal to the then-Rector and Vestry that a combined position be created for me. This would allow me to begin a series of weekly concerts which I hoped would raise the profile of the parish, increase knowledge of, and interest in, the organ and encourage gifts from donors who might be reluctant to give to a situation in which the organ was only used or heard on Sundays, and then exclusively for the congregation. It was my hope that other organists would be interested in playing the instrument, resulting in my needing to play only about half of the concerts myself.

The result of this was the beginning of the Wednesday Concerts on July 14, 1999. Unfortunately, I was wrong about the interest of other organists to play. This has meant that I have played the lion's share of the concerts, resulting my having played a total of 614 concerts at St. Ann's as of May 14, 2014, with a repertoire that has covered over 650 works. This has turned into a tremendous opportunity to introduce people to a wide variety of music for the organ. It has come to my attention that there are many regular attendees for whom these concerts are a means of bringing calm and perspective to their stressful lives, making the series an important form of outreach. An offshoot of the concerts developed several years ago when I issued an open invitation to the New York City Schools to bring classes of students to St. Ann's for organ demonstrations. This has resulted in around 40 classes of 15-30 students coming to the church to experience the parish's wonderful building, windows and organ.

While I may have been wrong about the interest of organists to play on the series, I was luckily very right about the interest the concerts would generate among donors. From the attendees of the Wednesday Concerts who give anywhere from \$1-\$20 to the several donors who have given thousands (and two who have given hundreds of thousands), the greater non-Sunday visibility of the church and the organ has resulted in full funding for major restoration work on the organ, the replacement of the chancel floor and significant funding for the restoration of the side roofs of the church, as well as other capital improvements.

As far as the organ is concerned, I leave an instrument which now finally has begun to sound as it was intended in 1925. It is more stable in tuning and tonally more satisfying than at any previous point in the last 40 years. This does not mean that it is out of the woods. The instrument is 89 years old, and some sections have still not received any attention. Four ranks of pipes remain to be re-installed, and the chimes and celesta have been silent for years. Even now, I am dealing with scattered dead notes and other problems. As I have tried to point out during my tenure, this instrument is both the parish's treasure *and* its responsibility. While I have been the one to play it and guide its care for the last 21 years, it does not belong to me. It is my earnest hope that St. Ann's will be able to continue caring for the instrument as befits one of the great musical treasures of New York City.

While regret is always possible in any situation, I cannot but feel that I have accomplished a great deal at St. Ann & the Holy Trinity since 1993. We have been on quite a ride, the parish and I, and we have survived some very tough times. There have also been great accomplishments and moments of joy. I hope that all of you will be able to be present for a last moment of both sorrow

and joy when I play my Farewell Recital on June 15 at 7:00 PM. And when I play my last Sunday on June 22, I commend you to the grace of God, who has redeemed us through the gift given us through the cross and resurrection of Jesus, and in whom all our sorrows and all our joys find their true home.