

# Church Music Survey 2011

The Executive Committee of Church Music Dublin regularly asks itself the question 'Are we meeting the actual needs of musicians working in parish churches throughout the dioceses and effectively contributing to the promotion of music in worship?'

To help the members of the Executive respond to this fundamental question, a survey of music in parish churches was carried out early in 2011: mainly by means of a web-based questionnaire and also by direct contact with clergy and musicians.

By the beginning of June, information had been received from all 103 churches in the diocese (quite an achievement!).

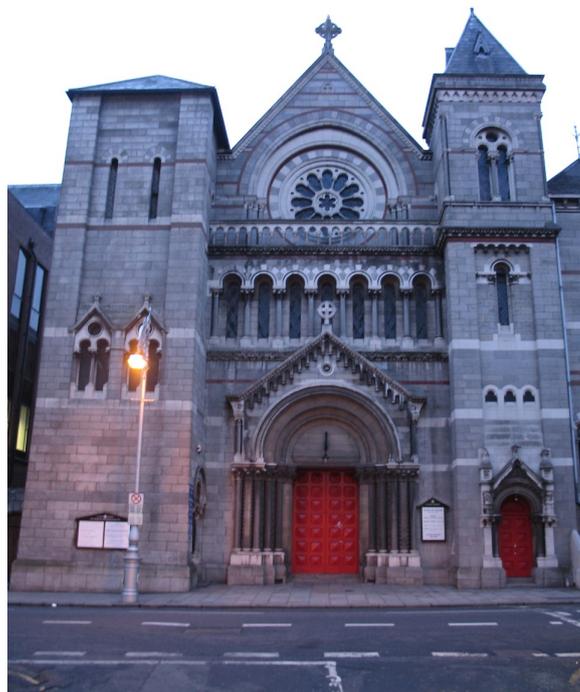
While it was hoped that musicians and clergy would supply the information jointly, as matters turned out the data was supplied by 68 clergy, 13 musicians, and 4 administrators.

The results provide a fascinating snapshot of Anglican parish church worship in the Dublin region in the first decade of the 21st century.

What follows are

- tables containing the key quantitative findings of the survey,
- Church Music Dublin's initial views about what the data reveals; and
- reflections on what steps might be taken to respond appropriately and effectively.

The data relates to the 54 parish units in the Dioceses of Dublin and Glendalough, embracing 103 churches.



## Ethnic origin of Sunday morning assembly

Ethnic origin	Churches
Mainly Irish	94
A mix of Irish and other nationalities	6
Over 50% non-nationals from Europe	2
Over 50% non-nationals from outside Europe	1
	<b>103</b>

Table 1

## Age profile

Age profile	Churches
'Have adults of working age'	103
'Have retired people'	97
'Have primary school children'	78
'Have teenagers'	45
'Have babies and toddlers'	69

Table 2

## Sunday worship

Average Sunday morning attendance	Churches
Up to 30	33
31 - 75	43
76 - 100	15
101-150	7
150 - 200	4
201 and over	1
	<b>103</b>

Table 3

An early Sunday morning Eucharist takes place	Churches
Every Sunday	30
On alternate Sundays	7
Once a month	4
In alternate months	2
At Christmas and Easter only	1
Seldom / never	59
	<b>103</b>

Table 4

A principal Sunday morning service takes place	Churches
Every Sunday	94
On alternate Sundays	5
Rarely / never	4
	<b>103</b>

Table 5

Evening Service	Churches
Every Sunday	12
Monthly	7
Occasionally	8
Rarely/Never	76
	<b>103</b>

Table 6

Type of principal Sunday morning service	Churches
The Eucharist is the principal service every Sunday	3
The Eucharist is celebrated twice a month and Morning Prayer / Service of the Word / Family Service on the other Sundays	70
Family Service takes place once a month	40
Family Service takes place three times a month	1
Family Service takes place twice a month	1
Family Service takes place rarely/never	61

Table 7

## Instruments and singing

Instruments used at principal Sunday services	Used in	Frequency
Organ	74 churches	Every Sunday
Piano	9 churches	Every Sunday
Band	6 churches	Every Sunday
Choir	21 churches	Every Sunday
Choir	3 churches	3 Sundays a month
Choir	2 churches	2 Sundays a month
Cantor	3 churches	Every Sunday
Cantor	2 churches	One Sunday a month

Table 8

Music is selected by	Churches
Clergy and musician	53
Clergy only	26
Musician only	24
	<b>103</b>

Table 9

## Repertoire

Singing the Gloria in Excelsis, Sanctus, Psalms and Canticles			Churches
At the Eucharist	the <i>Gloria in Excelsis</i> is sung regularly	to a congregational setting	29
At the Eucharist	the <i>Sanctus</i> is sung regularly	to a congregational setting	27
At the Eucharist	no parts of the liturgy are sung regularly		51
The Psalms	are sung at all services	to Anglican chant	7
The Psalms	are sung at the Eucharist and Morning Prayer	to Anglican chant	18
The Psalms	are sung at Morning Prayer only	to Anglican chant	11
The Psalms	are sung at the Eucharist only	to Anglican chant	2
The Psalms	are sung	to plainchant	2
The Psalms	are sung	responsorially	5
The Canticles	are sung by everyone using	Anglican chant	51
The Canticles	are sung by everyone	using a composed setting	3
The Canticles	are sung by a choir	using a composed setting	3
The Canticles	are sung	using a metrical version	29

Table 10

## Lead Musicians

Title	Total	Remunerated	Not remunerated
Director of music	18	17	1
Organist	69	53	16
Choir Director	8	6	2
Band Leader	12	3	9
<b>Totals</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>28</b>

8 churches have a team of musicians.  
13 churches use recorded music

Table 11

## Choirs

Type of Choir	Rehearse weekly	Rehearse monthly	Rehearse occasionally
Adult SATB	20		13
Adult Unison or 2-part	2		11
Children's	7	3	
Combined adult/children's	4		
Sunday school	2	2	2
Parish school	1		
Singing group	3	4	
Gospel	3	1	
	<b>42</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>26</b>

Table 12

Children's singing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 21 Sunday schools use instrumental accompaniment for singing.</li> <li>• 8 Sunday schools use recorded music for singing</li> <li>• 1 Sunday school uses a Cantor</li> <li>• 10 churches use recorded music for children's singing</li> </ul>

Table 13

# Some Reflections and Recommendations

## **The prime job of the parish church musician is to facilitate and encourage the singing of the entire worshipping community**

Only 1 in 5 churches in the dioceses (*Table 8*) has a choir that sings every Sunday. It is clear that the number of parish church choirs and the number of singers in them has been falling for many years. It is very difficult to attract new / younger personnel. Most people in our time seek the enjoyment of choral singing by joining a secular rather than a church choir. It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that in most situations the traditional, 4-part, church choir is no longer either a viable or a satisfactory resource for leading the choral aspect of worship.

Musicians must increasingly see their role as being to engage with the entire worshipping assembly. The prime responsibility of the organist is to lead the congregational singing. Care should be exercised to ensure that the singing of a choir does not diminish congregational participation. Standards of music performance outside church are now very high and a musically inadequate church choir can distract people rather than encourage them to come to church. It may well be the case that members of a struggling choral group will be more effectively located within the main body of worshippers. In all but a very few places, the priority must be to facilitate prayerful singing by the entire assembly. This can be achieved without a separate choral resource.

## **Sing the 'Holy, holy, holy Lord'**

At the Eucharist, just under 30 churches regularly sing the *Gloria in Excelsis* and/or the *Sanctus* (*Table 10*). The *Sanctus* (the proclamation of the thrice Holy God we worship) is one of the Judaeo-Christian tradition's oldest hymns and, arguably, should take precedence of all other hymnody. The *Sanctus* is entirely scriptural (*cf.* Isaiah 6.3 and Revelation 4.8) and it offers the opportunity to praise God at a high point in the liturgy.

In places where the *Sanctus* is not regularly sung, clergy and musicians should consider introducing it. *Church Hymnal* has two versions (Nos. 714 and 715) and a large number of other simple congregational settings are readily available, many of them easily sung without the need for instrumental accompaniment. It should be noted (as Bishop John Neill pointed out some years ago) that when the *Sanctus* is sung at the end of Eucharistic Prayer 3, the Great Amen that immediately follows, should also be sung.

## **The use of psalms in our liturgy is not optional**

The survey reveals that the psalms are sung regularly in only 45 churches in the dioceses (*Table 10*). In a further 42 churches, the psalms are rarely or never used—a fact of which we cannot be proud. The appointed psalm, whether at Morning Prayer or the Eucharist, is an integral part of the liturgy and this should be respected. The psalm also is the carefully chosen people's response to the Old Testament reading that precedes it. The psalm may be said or sung in various ways (*cf.* BCP pp. 592-593). In our dioceses, the use of Anglican chant for psalmody in parish churches appears to be confined to churches that have choirs. There are many simpler methods of singing the psalms congregationally, either responsorially or to very simple four-note chant. Instrumental accompaniment is not necessary. Clergy and musicians should explore the possibilities.

## **A growing need for trained cantors as well as organists**

Only 5 churches in the united dioceses use a cantor, 3 regularly, 2 less often. Many people, particularly those who have experienced Christian worship outside Ireland, comment positively on the role of the cantor. While the responsibility of the organist is to lead the congregational singing, the prime role of the cantor is to facilitate and encourage the worshipping assembly in song; to enable it to lift its voice in praise. In some places, this role is extended to include helping people to develop a new repertoire of song to support their faith.

The appointment of cantors is a logical next-step to the recent introduction in the Church of Ireland of psalms sung with refrains (often referred to as 'responsorial psalmody'). Cantors will require professional training if they are to be effective, and will merit being paid. These developments will impact on the current role of the church organist. All involved in the music of worship need to keep abreast of discussion and thinking generally about such issues.

## **The Church needs well-trained and remunerated musicians**

Parishes need to understand that a core need is for each church to have a skilled musician who sees their role primarily as a facilitator.

It is fundamental to the local church's stewardship that the musician should be remunerated. If they are unwilling to accept fees, the money should be put aside for the future. This will avoid an unwelcome increase in expenditure when a new musician is appointed.

Trained musicians who have responsibility for singing

groups, bands and instrumental ensembles in church, like organists, are also entitled to remuneration. To have a 'volunteer' musician is not always a good thing. Unpaid staff will sometimes resist even the most tactfully phrased instruction or direction.

A paid musician will usually have a more balanced, professional, and honest reporting relationship with their supervisor, the rector. Competence and confidence are the marks of the professional musician—the ability to deliver good-quality music and a confidence in their ministerial role within the body of Christ.

### **In-service training for parish musicians**

Of the 107 parochial musicians identified by the survey, 79 are paid (*Table 11*). The diocesan guidelines on the remuneration of musicians make it clear that the recommended rates are contingent on the musician, at all stages of his/her career, engaging regularly in relevant and appropriate in-service training. This recommendation is not being implemented. Clergy need to encourage their musicians to develop their skills so that they continue to be competent and confident in their work and keep abreast of new developments. This issue should be brought to the attention of select vestries.

### **Archbishop of Dublin's Certificate in Church Music**

The survey's findings have clear implications for the syllabus of the course leading to the Archbishop of Dublin's Certificate in Church Music. It may be necessary to broaden the scope of tuition in leading the singing of psalms; and to place greater emphasis on developing skills in leading hymns and worship songs and working with a range of instrumentalists. Over time, the skills of the cantor may become a significant feature of the training, especially expertise in getting the entire assembly to sing.

### **Musicians and clergy should meet and discuss regularly**

While definite evidence is not readily available, it is very clear anecdotally that many clergy and musicians do not engage regularly with one another. It is strongly recommended that an uninterrupted meeting of at least one hour be held twice a year at a minimum. This is no more than good management and effective communication.

### **Music in church and young people: reflecting contemporary culture**

Young people may not wish or be in a position to attend church on a Sunday morning. In 7 churches (both urban and rural) informal weekend evening worship in a contemporary style is held very successfully, followed by supper. Music is usually led

by guitar, electric keyboard and other instruments. This is a good example of the imaginative and creative thinking that is required in presenting worship.

The nature of music used in the local church has changed dramatically during the last 40 years. People in our times generally listen to a very wide range of high-quality music, using an assortment of modern technologies. Church is one of the only places where the ordinary member of the public is welcome to engage in community singing - therefore such music has to be accessible. As a consequence, church musicians need at all times to be aware of and understand music of the culture outside church. The extent to which such music is brought into the existing worship context is, of course, a matter for each place to work out.

Church musicians will find it easier to make right decisions about such matters if they are clear about their role and mission, are open-minded, imaginative and flexible, and seek out from within the faith community the entire range of vocal and instrumental skills available.

### **Young children singing**

The survey yielded only incomplete information as regards music and children in church. Music for children is well done in places; not so in others. There is some evidence that singing is no longer a regular feature of Sunday Club sessions. How will our children become familiar with even a handful of classic hymns (including classics of the last 50 years) unless they are introduced to these at a relatively young age in school and Sunday Club? It is strongly recommended that a hymn or song that is accessible to children should be sung by the entire worshipping community each Sunday before the children leave church (one with an easy refrain will suit even the smallest child).

Joined-up thinking and planning is needed by all involved in music for children in worship. There should be improved and ongoing communication between the Diocesan Church Music Committee and others involved with music for children in church, including teachers in parish schools.

A further survey may well be needed focusing exclusively on how children up to Confirmation age engage with music in church and how we might best use the opportunities to pass on our faith in song to the church of the future.

*These reflections represent Church Music Dublin's initial reaction to this important survey, which it is hoped will stimulate thought and discussion among musicians and clergy.*

**Please send any comments and observations on the survey to [info@churchmusicdublin.org](mailto:info@churchmusicdublin.org)**