

The Loose@9 Structure

Why do we minister?

- to share our musical talents
- to lead the assembly in song & sung prayer
- to be part of a community within community

How do we minister?

- music serves as an expression of faith.
- the Three Judgments:
 - * Musical: Is the music technically, aesthetically and expressively good?
 - * Liturgical: Is it appropriate to and matching the nature of the liturgy?
 - * Pastoral: Do we enable the assembly to express their faith in this place, age and culture?

An outline of sung parts:

Processional Songs

- Gathering Hymn
- Baptismal procession (*as needed*)
- Offertory Hymn (*Presentation of the Gifts*)
- Communion Hymn
- Processional Hymn

Service Music

- Gloria (*or Kyrie*)
- Psalm
- Sequence (*Gospel Acclamation*)
- Prayers of the People response
- Sanctus (*Holy, holy, holy*)
- Our Father
- Fraction Anthem (*Lamb of God or Alleluia*)

Optional Songs

- Prelude
- Postlude

Weekly Rehearsals

Why 7:00-8:15 pm on Thursdays?

- to learn new music
- to improve delivery of the music
- to correct mistakes and maintain quality
- to hear what everyone is singing and playing
- to develop a good, consistent ensemble sound
- to determine optimal seating arrangements

Why 8:30-8:50 am on Sundays?

- to get warmed up
- to review what we learned on Thursday
- reminders and last-minute changes
- finalizing seating arrangements

Having rehearsal without everyone present is like playing a guitar or piano with missing strings.

What's it all about?

- celebration of the Liturgy of the Word and the Liturgy of the Eucharist
- our role is to enhance that celebration by blending our ministry with those of acolytes, readers, ushers, celebrant and other servants of worship.

Thank you

- for your time
- for your talents
- for your ministry

*To sing like this,
in the company of other souls,
and to make those consonants
slip out so easily and in unison,
and to make those chords so rich
that they bring tears to your eyes,
This is transcendence.
This is the power
that choral singing has
that other music can only dream of.
~~~Garrison Keillor*

# The Loose@9 Sound

## Why do we sound the way we do?

The charge I was given when I was asked to take on *Loose@9* in 2005:

*(I had played with the group for a couple of years, and in the interest of full disclosure, I patiently explained that while I had a lot of experience playing mandolin in bands, I had no choral vocal experience or credentials suitable for this position. So much for sanity, here we are.)*

What the worship leadership wanted of the ensemble for the 9:00 am service:

- a) they wanted it to sound good
- b) they were more interested in a good working band (instruments & vocals) than a traditional choir
- c) they wanted it to facilitate congregational singing in an engaged and worshipful way
- d) they wanted it to be inclusive
- e) they wanted people to enjoy participating in it as an avenue of service to the parish, understanding that it's ministry, not performance
- f) they described the sound they wanted as Folk/Celtic
- g) they wanted it to sound good

## So what are the hallmarks of Folk/Celtic style of music?

Tunes that are singable, with a memorable and accessible melodic line

- from the Celtic side, that would be melody as king – historically, voice accompanied by harp, or dancing to solo violin – the rhythm in the melody.
  - often enriched by harmony
    - and supported by rhythm (not the other way around, which often characterizes other forms of music, including world/ethnic music, rock 'n roll, pop, praise, etc, which is often rhythm driven.)

## This means one of the things we work hard at in *Loose@9* is **blend**.

We have such a variety of instruments, including some nontraditional ones, that it can be a challenge. We rely on a high level of ability to listen and adjust to others, hear what will fit, to improvise and adjust in context, take feedback, and so on. There's a lot of reliance on the individual skill of the instrumentalist to make it fit and blend, melodically, harmonically and rhythmically.

Same thing with voices.

We have a wide range of voices (volume, timbre, confidence, experience), some of which extend beyond what's traditionally considered folk. Big voices are traditionally associated with services like the 11:15. They utilize the heavy vibrato, high notes, and so on, and that style works for people who enjoy that kind of music, which has its place.

But that's not us, so big voice people have the added responsibility of listening harder, ratcheting back on the volume, vibrato, intensity on high notes and so on, to go folk. There are places to cut loose with that other wonderful stuff: Bob's Annual Christmas special, special occasions, gospel sing-a-longs, ceilidhs, etc. But that's different from what we're doing on Sunday mornings at 9:00.

That's why rehearsal is so important. **It's all in the blend.**

Thank you for your dedication, commitment & stewardship to your parish community through your service in *Loose@ 9:00*. May our voices blend with all the saints at St. Michaels to truly "make a joyful noise to the Lord."

## Loose@9 Expectations

Our ensemble is a volunteer choir made up of people of all ages who love to sing and/or play. While an ability to read music is helpful, it is not necessary. The mission of our ensemble is to steward our musical gifts in a way that supports the experience of liturgical music and prayer in our parish, facilitating full and active participation in worship for all who are present.

### **Schedule:**

We rehearse on Thursday evenings, 7:00 to 8:15ish pm in the sanctuary and on Sunday mornings 8:30 to 8:50 in the choir room.

We sing at the 9:00 o'clock service each Sunday morning, as well as for various parish celebrations. We sing more frequently during Advent, Lent and Holy Week, and the occasional wedding, funeral or diocesan event.

### **Attendance:**

Because we sing weekly, and sing pieces that involve harmonies and descants, and blend with our additional instruments – attendance at our rehearsals is crucial. It takes great dedication to be a choir member. Of course, life happens. We are all busy people with many demands on our times and resources. Our goal is perfect togetherness – every breath together, every entrance spot on, every tempo exactly where it should be, every dynamic variation perfect, each voice and harmony element quintessentially blended, each rhythmic and obbligato voice in perfect sync – that's all there is to it. And we get there via rehearsal and being attentive to direction and the rest of the choir.

You are volunteers, which means you choose, every week, whether to come to rehearsal or not. Without regular attendance, the choir as a whole will not succeed at our mission to be as good as we can be. Rehearsals = success. Using the MIA clipboard to indicate weeks you anticipate being missing, and/or a quick e-mail is very helpful, both for planning ahead and for pragmatic things like chair placement, how many voices per part or instruments will be available. This helps invaluablely in the arrangement process.

Singing seasonally is also perfectly acceptable, as is singing occasionally if that's what works with your schedule. We focus Thursday night on the music that will be sung the next Sunday morning, so it is easy to pair the rehearsal with a specific Sunday. The service music runs for an entire season, which may range from a few weeks to several months.

### **Music:**

We sing primarily from the choral edition of the Gather Comprehensive hymnal (which is different from the one in the pew). Our goal is for each of you to have your own hymnal (in which you should write your name to keep track.) We encourage writing notes to self (**in pencil**) in your hymnal to keep the specifics of how we arrange each song each time we use it, which may vary from one time to the next. You may find it helpful to record rehearsal (*what we do at church*) to facilitate your practice (*what you do at home*) between rehearsals. We occasionally sing from octavos or other music books. These we keep in our liturgical storage space.

Some of our technologically hip folk have gone over to the digital reader side of the universe. For users of iPads or other gadgetry, what we do is usually available as PDF files in time for Thursday rehearsal.

We have gone back and forth over whether participation in Thursday's rehearsal is a requirement for singing on Sunday morning. Clearly, the Sunday morning warm-up is not enough to be rehearsed on the music. Sometimes, it's enough for people to police themselves and sit out, or to sing quietly on something unfamiliar. But, rehearsal is important as there are often nuances or elements of arrangement that are critical to sounding as good as we need to in order to support a worshipful atmosphere rather than distract from it. Unfamiliarity can lead to distracting questions, errors in tempo or dynamics or entrances.

### **Service etiquette:**

Our spot – front & west – is a live space, acoustically (and visually) even when the sound system is not on. Please try to keep talking, whispering, milling about, tripping over cords, paper shuffling, dozing off, etc. to a minimum.

### **Set up:**

Sunday setup is a challenge given the time constraints between the 7:30 service and the 9:00. This splits our efforts between setup and warm-up. Not ideal, but it's what we have. We also have to take down equipment and arrange furniture again for the 11:15. The white microphones are very delicate, so extra care in carrying and placing them in the cabinet is important. The cords have some delicacy as well. The less they are walked on, the longer they last. To disconnect them, it's important to grasp the metal end connecting to either mic box or snake box, depress the latch key with your thumb and remove. Pulling/yanking on a cord to remove it is attempted murder. The cords get coiled, velcro'd, and hung in the mic cabinet.