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Music and mission

Altogether, the occasion fosters a sense of musical community across parish boundaries and continues the celebration of Christmastide beyond the day itself. Taking a free-will collection for a local charity also bonds singers and attendees in community outreach—and helps fulfill the social justice mission that is part of the charge for NPM chapters. I cannot overstate how important the element of outreach is, lest the festival become merely navel-gazing on the part of the participants.

The concert therefore must be well publicized, open to the public, and free admission. The collection taken up should be for a specific charity important to the region: organizations that work with those in any crisis or work to prevent hunger and homelessness are a few examples.

The work required to organize an event like this can be shared among a small team but is ideally coordinated by one industrious and organized planner. Here are most of the tasks required, along with a rough timeline as well:

Late Spring or Early Fall:

- Identify a location for the event and a date. An ideal location would be a church participating in the festival and which has, in addition to the sacred space for the concert itself, a fellowship hall or gathering space nearby for a reception. In terms of date, we have held the concert either on the Sunday night of Epiphany, or on a Wednesday or Thursday night near that date, as those are typical rehearsal nights for our area choirs.



- This is also a good time to sort out who at the host site can organize a reception: setup, food and drink, etc. (Having participants bring in a plate of cookies is a quick path to a potluck holiday reception!)

November:

- Create and distribute an invitation to participate to area parish music directors. Our channels in St. Louis include an email newsletter and a couple pages and groups on Facebook—and personal invitations work well of course, too. It's best to have firm commitments in hand by the middle of December, before the true craziness of the holidays strikes. We have found that five or six participating groups is a good number.
- Once a few groups have signed on, it's time to begin a little general publicity: creating a concert flyer and bulletin and web announcements for the host site, all participating groups, and all nearby parishes if possible.

December:

- Get finalized selections (including composers, arrangers, and perhaps publishers) from participating choirs for a program. Limiting groups to 3 pieces or around 12 minutes of music (depending how many groups there are) is about right.
- This is also the time to organize some logistics. The concert itself flows well by utilizing well-known Epiphany hymns for all to sing while one ensemble is vacating the performance space and the next group takes their place. Seat participating groups on alternating sides of your church if you can, reserving space in the middle for concert attendees.
- Be sure to save “We Three Kings” for the big finale with all participants assembled to form a large festival choir!

Considering a 2021 Epiphany Choir Festival? For examples of the invitation, concert flyer, logistics information, and 2020 concert program, visit: <https://orinjohnson.com/npm-epiphany>

—Orin Johnson, chapter branch programs coordinator

How to Host an Epiphany Choir Festival St. Louis, Missouri

In the months leading up to Christmas, choirs diligently work on music for Nativity masses. An Epiphany Choir Festival is a wonderful way to extend the sharing of that hard-practiced seasonal music.

For the past five years, the Duchesne branch of the St. Louis NPM chapter has held such an Epiphany Choir Festival on or near that solemnity in early January. This event is relatively simple to put together and meets a number of goals for our area parishes and the broader local community.

The core of the event is a free public concert which allows parish choirs an additional opportunity to share the beautiful seasonal music they prepared for parish liturgies. It also gives choir directors a chance to hear new and different repertoire from other ensembles, and perhaps get a head start on planning for next Christmas!