

A Berry Good Workshop in Hexham



Here is Paul Berry from St. Mary's, Hexham, directing a workshop on music for the Triduum liturgies.

As a consequence of the 2016 'Open Composers' Forum' at St. Cuthbert's, Chester-le-Street, a link was made with Mr Paul Berry, musical director of St. Mary's RC Church, Hexham. Paul brought along a series of interesting and usable compositions, which could be sung in unison for smaller choirs or congregations with the option of four-part (soprano, alto, tenor and bass) harmonies. Such was the impressive nature of his work, that the DCMA asked Paul to facilitate a workshop for the diocese, prior to Lent and Easter, and with a focus on the Triduum liturgies.

Over seventy people attended the workshop which lasted from 10:30am – 4:30pm. Three sessions focussed on music for each of the days of the Triduum, and covered a wide range of genres and styles of music. Congregation-friendly processionalals (by Dan Schutte (well-known for the hymn, 'I the Lord of sea and sky'), psalms, Taizé chants, antiphons (by John L. Bell), as well as Latin pieces ('Adoremis in Aeternum' by Gregorio Allegri) were learnt and rehearsed, as well as items composed by Paul himself.



Paul's gift for incorporating old and new music was beautifully demonstrated in a piece he has composed for the Veneration of the Cross on Good Friday. In 'Crux Fidelis', Paul neatly integrated the Picardy tune ('Let all mortal flesh' with lyrics for Good Friday) with his own singable refrain, whose words reinforced the image of Jesus' crucifixion.

Paul has clearly addressed the needs of a 'typical parish with few resources'. His 'Blessing Cup' psalm for Maundy Thursday, for example, can be sung as a simple melody line if desired and is very effective. Paul has also written a complete set of psalms for the Easter Vigil, originally designed to be sung 'a capella', although accompaniments are available should the parish wish.

Also during the day, there were opportunities for instrumentalists to be involved. Those bringing instruments were offered breakout sessions during lunch and coffee breaks where they could rehearse pieces prior to the performance of them at the 4.00pm Mass. Fr. Christopher Warren celebrated Mass and asked those present to pray for past and present members of the DCMA as well as those who support the ministry of music within the Diocese.

