

**For Immediate Release  
December 21, 2007**

**CAN CATHOLICS SING?  
Depends on Where You're Sitting**

Can Catholics sing? In a recent online survey by the National Association of Pastoral Musicians (NPM), both musicians and non-musicians thought that congregational singing was better in their own community than it is in most U.S. parishes.

Directors, organists, cantors, choir members, instrumentalists, and other music ministers, however, rated assembly singing much more positively than did the people in the pews. Almost three-quarters of the survey respondents were involved in some form of music ministry.

A large majority of music ministers – 72 percent – characterized the singing of their congregations as “very strong” or “somewhat strong.” Non-musicians had a rather different perception, however. Only 39 percent of this group thought that the singing of the assembly was strong in their parish.

Both groups had negative opinions of the general state of congregational singing in the United States, which received a positive rating from just 39 percent of musicians and 27 percent of non-musicians.

Why do music ministers perceive congregational singing as stronger than do the people in the pews? One explanation could be that in most churches music ministers are a bit removed from the assembly and can more easily hear the corporate sound of the singing assembly while non-musicians are often painfully aware of those immediately around them who are not singing.

Another factor could be the poor acoustics in many churches that results from the overuse of sound-absorbing materials. Instead of blending the assembly's voices, many church buildings actually deaden sound and prevent people in the congregation from sensing the strength of singing.

Whatever the reason for the striking difference of opinion or perception, the NPM survey provides food for thought for pastors, musicians, and other pastoral leaders.

<b>How would you rate the congregational singing in your own parish of worshipping community?</b>	<b>Involved in Music Ministry (Percent)</b>	<b>Not Involved in Music Ministry (Percent)</b>	<b>Total (Percent)</b>
<b>Very strong</b>	26	16	23
<b>Somewhat strong</b>	46	23	39
<b>Somewhat weak</b>	23	36	27
<b>Very weak</b>	5	25	11

<b>Based on your experience of participating in the liturgy of other parishes and communities, how would you rate congregational singing generally in the United States?</b>	<b>Involved in Music Ministry (Percent)</b>	<b>Not Involved in Music Ministry (Percent)</b>	<b>Total (Percent)</b>
<b>Very strong</b>	3	3	3
<b>Somewhat strong</b>	36	24	33
<b>Somewhat weak</b>	53	53	53
<b>Very weak</b>	8	20	11



The **NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF PASTORAL MUSICIANS** fosters the art of musical liturgy. NPM members serve the Catholic Church in the United States as musicians, clergy, liturgists, and other leaders of prayer. NPM's 8,700 members receive a bimonthly magazine, *Pastoral Music*; a bimonthly newsletter for members called *Pastoral Music Notebook*; the weekly e-mail service *Sunday Word for Pastoral Musicians*; and the e-mail newsletter *Pastoral Music E-Notes*. NPM provides ongoing formation for musicians and clergy through annual conventions, educational institutes, and events in more than 70 diocesan chapters. The Association also provides certification programs for cantors, organists, and directors of music ministries.

This information is submitted by J. Michael McMahon, NPM President. For further information, please contact Dr. McMahon at the National Association of Pastoral Musicians, 962 Wayne Avenue, Suite 210, Silver Spring, MD 20910. Phone (240) 247-3000. Fax (240) 247-3001. E-mail [mcmahon@npm.org](mailto:mcmahon@npm.org). Web [www.npm.org](http://www.npm.org).