

Guidelines:

Music Within the Mass

Introduction

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide support to parish music leaders and groups in their day-to-day ministry of music within the Mass.

The document

- recalls the centrality of the Eucharist to our Catholic way of life,
- helps in understanding the purpose and importance of music within the Mass,
- identifies the assembly as the primary music minister,
- details the important role of music ministers in preparation and coordination of the assembly's music ministry,
- identifies the different forms of liturgical song within the Mass,
- explains the options and helps guide the selection of music for the various parts of the Mass,
- identifies other key concerns for parish and school music ministry as well as strategies and resources to address them.

It is hoped that these guidelines will assist you in your music ministry and help make our celebration of the Mass "an uplifting experience of the community at prayer and worship."

The Centrality of Liturgy and the Eucharist

As Catholics, we know that celebrating the liturgy of the Church is at the heart of the way we give glory to God. The term 'liturgy' has its origins in the Greek word *λειτουργία*, meaning 'public work' or a 'service in the name of / on behalf of the people.' This word appears throughout the New Testament, and is understood to mean the participation of the People of God in the work of the Triune God (cf. Lk 1:23; Acts 13:2; Rom 15:16, 27; 2 Cor 9:12; Phil 2:14-17, 25, 30; Heb 8:2, 6).

Through liturgy, Christ continues the work of our redemption in, with and through his Church. The liturgy is our way of participating publicly in the ongoing work of Christ – in worship, proclamation of the Gospel and active charity – to the glory of God (Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), 1069-70). No wonder the Second Vatican Council described liturgy as the summit and source of the Church's activity (Constitution on Sacred Liturgy, *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 10), and Eucharist (the Mass) as the source and summit of Christian life (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, 11).

The Function and Importance of Music in Liturgy

Our model for music in the liturgy is Jesus himself, who sang psalms with the apostles at the Last Supper (Mt 26:30; Mk 14:26). Music is an integral part of our participation in liturgy – an integral part of our participation in the work of God. For "when song and music are signs of the Holy Spirit's presence and action, they encourage, in a certain way, communion with the Trinity" (John Paul II, Address to the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music, 3; Chirograph on Sacred Music, 3).

The Second Vatican Council's Constitution on Sacred Liturgy (CSL) made particular mention of the role of music in fulfilling the purpose of liturgy, which is the glory of God and the sanctification of the faithful (CSL 112). The Second Vatican Council's Instruction on Music in the Liturgy, *Musicae Sacram* (MS), mentions five specific ministerial functions of music in the liturgy. Through music in the liturgy:

1. prayer is given a more graceful expression,
2. the mystery of the liturgy, with its hierarchical and community nature, is more openly shown,
3. the unity of hearts is more profoundly achieved by the union of voices,
4. minds are more easily raised to heavenly things by the beauty of the liturgy, and
5. the whole celebration more clearly prefigures the heavenly liturgy (cf. MS 4-5).

"One cannot find anything more religious and more joyful in sacred celebrations than a whole congregation expressing its faith and devotion in song" (MS 16).

"Great importance should therefore be attached to the use of singing in the celebration of the Mass, with due consideration for the culture of peoples and abilities of each liturgical assembly. Although it is not always necessary (e.g., in weekday Masses) to sing all the texts that are in principle meant to be sung, every care should be taken that singing by the ministers and the people is not absent in celebrations that occur on Sundays and on holy days of obligation" (General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), 40).

Our preparation and leadership of music within the Mass greatly assists the People of God, the community as the body of Christ, to experience "new life in the Spirit, involvement in the mission of the Church, and service to her unity" (CCC 1072).

The Role of the Music Ministry

The primary music minister in the liturgy is the assembly. At certain times the priest, the deacon, the choir, the musicians, the psalmist and the cantor have specific roles of their own. But there is no place in the liturgy for performances of art for art's sake.

Of special importance are the roles of music director, choir director and music coordinator, who are responsible for preparing, rehearsing and conducting the musical aspects of liturgical celebrations. They have a vital role in choosing the music and helping the assembly take an active part in the singing (cf. CSL 28, 30, 114, 118, and 121). The role of voice trainers is critical in preparing psalmists to sing the responsorial psalm. "From the smooth coordination of all – the priest celebrant and the deacon, the acolytes, the altar servers, the readers, the psalmist, the *schola cantorum* (choir), the musicians, the cantor and the assembly – flows the proper spiritual atmosphere which makes the liturgical moment truly intense, shared in and fruitful" (Chirograph, 8).

Liturgical Song Forms

Liturgical song is music wed to prayer text. The liturgy comprises a variety of different forms of prayer, each requiring a different song form for musical expression. Each part of the Mass takes one of the following seven forms:

A – An **acclamation** is a spontaneous joyful vocalisation sung by all, accompanied or unaccompanied.

C – a **cantillation** is a kind of spoken singing, usually unaccompanied, where the melody and rhythm is close to that of speech. It is used when prayers, readings and proclamations are sung instead of recited. Cantillations are sung by the priest celebrant or other minister and conclude with an acclamation of assent sung by all.

D – A **dialogue** between priest and people is used at the start of the Mass, and to introduce each major part – the Gospel, the Eucharistic Prayer, the Communion, and the dismissal. Dialogues are sung unaccompanied.

H – A **hymn** is a song of praise with no other accompanying liturgical action. There are only two hymns in the Mass, and they are not always sung. Singing of the “Glory to God” is by the choir or cantor alternating with the people, or entirely by the people or entirely by the choir alone (GIRM 53). If there is a song of praise after communion, singing is by the entire assembly (GIRM 88).

L – A **litany** is a prayer with a series of invocations or intercessions sung by a cantor or other minister, with a repeated response sung by all.

P – A **processional song** is one that accompanies another liturgical action. Songs with refrains and a variable number of verses are most appropriate. The beginning and ending should match the liturgical action. Singing is by the choir or cantor alternating with the people, or entirely by the people, or by the choir alone; alternatively, an instrumental solo may be played instead of singing a song (GIRM 48, 74, 87, 313; MS, 36, 66-67).

R – The **responsorial psalm** is sung scripture with no other accompanying liturgical action. All sing the psalm response at the beginning and after each verse; the cantor of the psalm sings the intervening verses. The texts are prescribed, with options to use the given psalm of the day or one of the common seasonal psalms or antiphons in the lectionary, or a chant from the *Graduale Romanum* or the *Graduale Simplex* (GIRM 61)

Choosing Music for Mass

Music fulfills its role in liturgy when: (1) the amount of singing aptly corresponds to the solemnity of the occasion, (2) the selected music provides for the unanimous participation of the assembly at the designated moments, and (3) the beauty of the compositions and their performance is expressive of prayer (cf. CCC 1157).

The amount of singing should correspond to the degree of festivity and solemnity of the particular celebration of the day, feast or season (MS 7). For example, weekdays are more subdued than Sundays; the major Sunday community Mass is more festive than other Sunday Masses; major feasts such as Trinity Sunday or Pentecost are more festive than other Sundays; the seasons of Lent and Advent are more subdued; the seasons of Christmas and Easter are more festive.

“In the choosing of the parts actually to be sung, however, preference should be given to those that are of greater importance and especially to those to be sung by the presider

or the deacon or the lector, with the people responding, or by the presider and people together" (GIRM 39-40; cf. MS 6, 7, 16, 28-36).

When choosing music and songs, "the criterion that must inspire every composition and performance of songs and sacred music is the beauty that invites prayer" (John Paul II, Address to the Pontifical Institute of Sacred Music, 3; cf. Chirograph, 3).

Music preparation involves the liturgy team, the musicians, the presider and the assembly. All need to work in collaboration, respecting the particular expertise each one brings to the process (cf. MS 5).

The Liturgical – Musical – Pastoral Criterion

There are three long-held principles that help us to choose the most appropriate music (cf. Pope John Paul II's Chirograph on Sacred Music, 4-6; *Musicam Sacram*, 5; and Pope Pius X's *Tra Le Sollecitudini*, 2, 7-9, 22-23):

1. Liturgically, it must be holy

To be holy, the music must serve the spirit and norms of the liturgy and the faith it expresses.

Is it closely connected with the liturgical action?

Not all music is suitable. Even some so-called Sacred Music "cannot be part of the celebration without violating the spirit and norms of the liturgy itself" (Chirograph, 4). To be closely connected to the liturgical action, "the meaning and the proper nature of each part and of each song" must be carefully observed (MS 6). These norms are detailed in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) and *Musicam Sacram* (MS). The relevant paragraphs are summarised in the table on page 6.

Does it express the Church's faith and teaching?

The text should be based on appropriate scriptural or liturgical texts. It should refer to God in the persons of the Trinity. It should express the nature of the Church as the People of God and the Body of Christ. It must not conflict with the catechetical teaching and tradition of the Church.

2. Musically, it must be beautiful

Much of the beauty of liturgical music is in its apt suitability to liturgical prayer.

Does it possess sound form?

The melodic range and contour, the harmony, rhythm and tempo must be aptly suited to singing by the intended music ministers – priest, cantor, *schola* (choir) and assembly. The form of song must be aptly suited to the particular part of the liturgy – cantillation (for prayers, readings and proclamations), dialogue, acclamation, litany, responsorial psalm, processional antiphon or song with repeating refrain, or hymn.

Is it true art?

It must have enduring appeal, able to bear the weight of repeated singing over time.

Does it fully adhere to the text it presents?

It must suitably embody the text of the liturgy. Prescribed texts must be used without variation. Where texts are not prescribed, "they must be in keeping with the parts of the Mass, the feast or the liturgical season" (MS 36).

Does it synchronise with the intended time and moment in the liturgy?

The music should be synchronised to begin and end at the times specified by the rite. "The various moments in the Liturgy require a musical expression of their own. From

time to time this must fittingly bring out the nature proper to a specific rite, now proclaiming God's marvels, now expressing praise, supplication or even sorrow" (Chirograph, 5).

Does it reflect the gestures of the rite?

It must be aptly suited to any gestures, actions or processions it accompanies (e.g. the breaking of the bread, the procession and presentation of the gifts).

3. Pastorally, it must be universal

The music must be suited to the particular assembly while respecting the need for universal appeal.

Does it comply with the legitimate demands for adaptation and inculturation?

The music should be in a language that is comprehensible to the majority (Chirograph, 6). There are many local cultural adaptations as well as special provisions for Masses with children and other special groups that must be considered. Your parish priest is best placed to discern what adaptations are applicable for a given situation.

Does it involve the entire assembly in the celebration?

The music must invite prayerful participation in each and every person, young and old.

Is it deserving of universal esteem, offending nobody?

Personal tastes in music vary greatly in a parish assembly. While not everything chosen will be everyone's favorite, all the music must be deserving of everyone's esteem. Music that offends anyone's prayerful sensibilities should be avoided.

In selecting music for a particular celebration, we should undertake an analysis of the liturgical, musical and pastoral characteristics of the music, and then ask the question: **"Does this particular piece of music possess the universal beauty that invites the involvement of the entire assembly in this particular prayer?"**

Music Languages and Styles

For the sake of the assembly, we should step out of our own comfort zone to embrace a variety of music styles. For example, in the same liturgical celebration we might sing songs accompanied by organ, piano, guitar and other instruments. We might just have an instrumental for the Procession of Gifts and we might have some unaccompanied singing (e.g. the Our Father). A typically folk or contemporary style band should try some of the popular traditional hymns, Taize and other chants. A more traditional, classical group should try doing some more contemporary popular songs and the new English-language chant Mass setting arranged for the assembly's participation. The Catholic Church has a rich and diverse treasury of sacred music.

Accessibility of Lyrics for the Assembly

It is important we make sure everyone in the assembly can at least read the words of songs from a hymnal, or a pew sheet. We greatly assist the assembly's participation if we provide both lyrics and melody.

Watch Your Language!

Some older songs have caused concern in many communities in the language they used. Most lyricists have addressed these issues and recent editions of songs have been updated. Check the websites of publishers and composers for text updates.

Other Resources

Primary Church Documents

See Vatican website (www.vatican.va)

Vatican II, **Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy**, *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (1963)

Vatican II, **Instruction on Music in the Liturgy**, *Musicam Sacram* (1967)

Congregation for Divine Worship, **Instruction on Masses with Special Groups** (1969)

Directory for Masses with Children (1973)

Lectionary for Mass, Introduction, 2nd Ed (1981)

John Paul II, **Chirograph on Sacred Music** (2003) Congregation for Divine Worship and Discipline of the Sacraments,

General Instruction of the Roman Missal, 3rd typical edition (2010)