

Diocese of St. Augustine

Norms and Guidelines for Cantor or Leader of Song

Ministers of the Word

1. Cantors lead the sung Word of God as *Sing to the Lord (STL)*, paragraphs 37 – 40 state:

The cantor is both a singer and a leader of congregational song. Especially when no choir is present, the cantor may sing in alternation or dialogue with the assembly. For example, the cantor may sing the invocations of the *Kyrie*, intone the *Gloria*, lead the short acclamations at the end of the Scripture readings, intone and sing the verse of the Gospel Acclamation, sing the invocations of the Prayer of the Faithful, and lead the singing of the *Agnus Dei*. The cantor may also sing the verses of the psalm or song that accompany the Entrance, Preparation of the Gifts, and Communion. Finally, the cantor may serve as psalmist, leading and proclaiming the verses of the Responsorial Psalm (*STL*, #37).

As a leader of congregational song, the cantor should take part in singing with the entire gathered assembly. In order to promote the singing of the liturgical assembly, the cantor's voice should not be heard above the congregation. As a transitional practice, the voice of the cantor might need to be amplified to stimulate and lead congregational singing when this is still weak. However, as the congregation finds its voice and sings with increasing confidence, the cantor's voice should correspondingly recede. At times, it may be appropriate to use a modest gesture that invites participation and clearly indicates when the congregation is to begin, but gestures should be used sparingly and only when genuinely needed (*STL*, #38).

Cantors should lead the assembly from a place where they can be seen by all without drawing attention from the liturgical action. When, however, a congregation is singing very familiar responses, acclamations, or songs that do not include verses for the cantor alone, the cantor need not be visible (*STL*, #39).

The cantor exercises his or her ministry from a conveniently located stand, but not from the ambo. The cantor may dress in an alb or choir robe, but always in clean, presentable, and modest clothing. Cassock and surplice, being clerical attire, are not recommended as vesture for the cantor (*STL*, #40).

2. The cantor or song leader, as per the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), is the person who leads the responsorial psalm has the ministerial role of psalmist. (*GIRM paragraph 61*) "The entire congregation remains seated and listens but, as a rule, takes part by singing the response." Under normal conditions in parishes, the cantor can fulfill this role.
3. The cantor extends a warm invitation, through gesture, facial expression and eye contact, to assist the assembly in responding to the psalm and singing the Gospel Acclamation. The cantor sings in tune, with clear diction, has a voice of good quality, and "proclaims the Psalm with clarity, conviction, and sensitivity to the text, musical setting and those who are listening." (*STL*, #35). The cantor should not dramatize the psalm or animate the text to such a degree as to distort the text and take focus away from the sacred Word. The cantors focus should always strive to center the listener on the proclaimed verses and not the person proclaiming them. The cantor must yield to the Word of God.

4. “The Importance of silence in the Liturgy cannot be overemphasized.” The Cantor regards silence as an integral part of worship. Allowing the faithful time to fully experience God’s presence and to contemplate and worship in a listening and meditative manner. “Music arises out of silence and returns to silence. God is revealed both in the beauty of song and in the power of silence. The Sacred liturgy has its rhythm of texts, actions, songs and silence. Silence in the Liturgy allows the community to reflect on what it has heard and experienced, and to open its hear to the mystery celebrated. Ministers and pastoral musicians should take care that the rites unfold with the proper ebb and flow of sound and silence.” (STL, #118).

Pastoral Considerations in the Selection of Candidates

Similar to those called to minister the Word of God as lectors, a candidate for the ministry of cantor should also demonstrate a strong faith and command clear communication skills. In the selection of candidates and in review of those exercising this ministry, the following considerations may be helpful:

Candidates generally have received the Sacraments of Initiation of the Catholic Church (Baptism, Confirmation and Eucharist) and regularly attend Mass on Sundays, holy days of obligation and frequently participate in the Sacraments. Younger singers, with advanced musical training and formation may be considered to cantor, when given proper instruction and oversight.

Candidates are persons who have gifts and skills in singing, a love of singing. They understand the importance of this ministry and appreciate the need for study and preparation and strive to be compassionate approachable students of the liturgy.

Formation

Cantors require specific, unique skills and *must* be able to sing well. The desire to be a leader of song must be coupled with an ability suited for such an important role.

Cantors understand the cycle of liturgical seasons, the parts of the Mass unique to each season and have a general awareness of each seasons’ affect, tone, and role within the entire liturgical year.

Those who aspire to this ministry should be formed in a basic theology of the ministry and of Word of God as well as its importance in the celebration of the sacred liturgy. Preparation should also include a basic background in biblical theology. Candidates should complete a period of instruction that lasts from 6 to 8 hours, beyond the mentoring with an experienced cantor, in order for them to have a foundation in the ministry of cantor. This training can be obtained at diocesan training events and workshops or at liturgical music events and conferences offered at the national level.

Cantors understand the ministry requires preparation which includes studying the entire psalm placing the Responsorial Psalm into an understood context, in combination with the other assigned lectionary readings, liturgical season, and the specific liturgy. ***Ongoing formation occurs on a regular basis throughout their ministry’s tenure and cantors are encouraged to attend at least two hours of training every two years.***

New cantors apprentice and sing with experienced cantors, mentors, for at least three Masses. The apprentice shadows the mentor to learn the timing of movements, bowing, comfort of being in front of the assembly and gradually sings more and more from the cantor’s position. The two should rehearse together before Mass as well as at another time during the week leading up to the Mass. They are open to critique and coaching.

All cantors at a parish should meet together regularly to review upcoming Mass part changes, hymns requiring cantor leadership, psalms and acclamations. The meetings should include liturgical catechesis as well as opportunities for cantors to sing under “live” conditions for their peers for mutual constructive feedback.

Commissioning and Terms of Service

Following their formation period, it is the responsibility of the pastor or his delegate to determine the suitability of the candidates who will exercise this ministry. It is recommended that those who will serve the parish community as cantors receive the Church’s blessing following their period of formation, before assuming this ministry. The blessing should normally take place during a Sunday celebration of the Eucharist. The texts are those in the Book of Blessings (chapter 61, nos. 1831-1846).

Cantor in Liturgical Celebration

- ❖ The Cantor models appropriate prayerful behavior at all times while in the church, attentive to Mass, focused on the liturgical celebration and not constituting a distraction.
- ❖ Maintain a dignified posture during those times in the liturgy that you are NOT singing.
- ❖ Rehearse with the organist, pianist, accompanist before Mass
- ❖ Before Mass, check the microphone and do a brief sound check if necessary.
- ❖ Check with the Director of Music or organist for any changes for the specific Mass
- ❖ The Cantor leads the responsorial psalm from the ambo.
- ❖ When approaching the ambo for the psalm it is appropriate to bow to the altar (when crossing in front of it), even if the tabernacle is in close proximity.
- ❖ When announcing a hymn, reference its title and hymn number, it is not necessary to announce the part of the mass occurring. (ie. “our processional hymn is”)
- ❖ When supporting the assembly toward full and active participation, be encouraging, smile, and warmly invite. An appropriate phrase at the beginning of liturgy can include "please join in singing", never terms that elevate or separate such as "join us " or "join the choir in singing".
- ❖ Never sing the psalm from a loose piece of paper. It is the Word of God and must be respected above a disposable piece of paper. The psalm should be in a binder or a holy book of psalms.
- ❖ If passing in front of the altar when returning, bow again in reverence of the altar.
- ❖ The pastor determines when the cantor receives Communion.
- ❖ Dress modestly. Please see the Diocesan General Norms for Diocesan Lay Liturgical Ministers, paragraph 5.

Special Considerations

Cantors with Disabilities

The church warmly welcomes into ministry qualified individuals who possess a variety of disabilities

including physical disabilities. Giving witness to the acceptance of God's gifts and working publicly through challenges can be a source of strength to the faith community at worship. Adaptations to the method of preparation and rehearsal may need to be made, and the location for leadership may need to remain stationary. The parish should provide adequate access to the podium and microphone.

Approved: Bishop Felipe J. Estévez
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