

Diocese of St. Augustine

Guidelines for Choir and Ensemble Ministers of Liturgical Music

Introduction (*from Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*)

1. “God has bestowed upon his people the gift of song. God dwells within each human person, in the place where music takes its source. Indeed, God, the giver of song, is present whenever his people sing his praises.”¹
2. “A cry from deep within our being, music is a way for God to lead us to the realm of higher things. As St. Augustine says, “Singing is for the one who loves.” Music is therefore a sign of God’s love for us and of our love for him. Singing together in church expresses the sacramental presence of God to his people.”²
3. “Obedient to Christ and to the Church, we gather in liturgical assembly, week after week. This common, sung expression of faith within liturgical celebrations strengthens our faith when it grows weak and draws us into the divinely inspired voice of the Church at prayer. Good music “make[s] the liturgical prayers of the Christian community more alive and fervent so that everyone can praise and beseech the Triune God more powerfully, more intently and more effectively”.³

Choir and Ensemble Ministers of Liturgical Music

- Choir and ensemble ministers of liturgical music have a unique role and responsibility in the celebration of liturgy. “The single most important role of music in liturgy, then, is to help us surrender to the paschal mystery as it unfolds within the rite.” The sacrifice that leads to the glory of God. “The role of music is not to entertain. The music is not an end in itself but a means to our renewal of identity as Body of Christ.”⁴ Therefore, music ministers offer their gifts and talents, their very selves, back to God the Creator, in service of the liturgy and ultimately the Body of Christ. Therefore, choir and ensemble music ministers strive to offer their best gifts and commit to attend rehearsals regularly on time, arrive prior to liturgy to prepare, so as to enter fully and serve prayerfully in the liturgical celebration.
- Liturgical music ministers of the choir and ensemble are those, through prayer and skill, are able to encourage and lead the assembly in sung prayer. Choir and ensemble members are committed to personal spiritual growth, and have a basic understanding of the liturgical year and the structure of the sacred liturgy. They also have the heart and willingness to serve the community through developing their musical training and are willing to give of their time to attend rehearsals to better support and facilitate the assembly in sung prayer with confidence and enthusiasm.

Selection of Candidates

- Those expressing interest or who feel called to serve are encouraged to share their time and talent and include all baptized persons exercising a strong faith with a musical capacity. Ministers of Music are chosen to reflect the diversity of the parish community, and should include individuals

¹ Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship, I.1

² Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship, I.2

³ Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship, I.5

⁴ The Ministry of Music, Liturgy and the Paschal mystery, Kathleen Harmon, p. 3

of various ages, social and ethnic background; of both sexes; of the married, single, divorced, and widowed state.⁵

- Able to play/sing in rhythm, to be aware of melody and harmony, and able to follow and respond to the director, particularly for phrasing, dynamics
- Willing to learn to read or follow music
- Able to encourage and support the assembly's full and active participation in song and prayer
- When a candidate is new to a community or his/her ability is unknown, a willingness to attend rehearsals for a period of time, to give the ministry a try, prior to full inclusion in the choir or ensemble is encouraged. This can assist in determining if Music Ministry is a "good fit".

Formation

- Pastoral musicians should receive appropriate formation that is based on their baptismal call to discipleship; that grounds them in a love for and knowledge of Scripture, Catholic teaching, Liturgy, and music; and that equips them with the musical, liturgical, and pastoral skills to serve the Church at prayer.⁶
- Choir members, like all liturgical ministers, should exercise their ministry with evident faith and should participate in the entire liturgical celebration, recognizing that they are servants of the Liturgy and members of the gathered assembly.⁷
- Given the choir is an integral part of the celebration of liturgy in many of its forms, ongoing formation is a necessary part of service. The Second Vatican Council stated emphatically that choirs must be diligently promoted while ensuring that "the whole body of the faithful may be able to contribute that active participation which is rightly theirs."⁸

Those who aspire to this ministry should be formed in a basic theology of liturgical music and its importance in the celebration of the sacred liturgy. Preparation should also include a basic background the church documents which include:

The new General Roman Missal, *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*, The Catechism of the Catholic Church, and The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum Concilium*, *Music in Catholic Worship* revised ed. Candidates should complete a period of instruction that lasts from 6 to 8 hours in order to be formed in the foundation of liturgical music ministry.

- "Choirs and ensembles comprise persons drawn from the community who possess the requisite musical skills and a commitment to the established schedule of rehearsals and liturgies. Thus, they are able to enrich the celebration by adding musical elements beyond the capabilities of the congregation alone."⁹ *Candidates should complete a period of instruction within the parish setting that lasts from 3 to 4 hours in order for them to have a foundation in the ministry of the music as a choir member.* Ongoing formation or meetings on an annual basis within the parish setting or at a diocesan level are recommended through the combined planning of the pastor and music director. Together, decisions concerning the

⁵ Guidelines and Resources for Musicians, Diocese of Green Bay, 2006.

⁶ *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*, II. F.50

⁷ *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*, II. E.32

⁸ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* no. 114.

⁹ *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* II. E.28

emphasis of ongoing formation and number of hours may include: liturgical understanding, spiritual growth, musicianship, instrument/vocal development etc. The Diocese, in support, will offer opportunities to meet these needs.

Ministry and Service

- It is most appropriate that Ministers of Music be commissioned for their role in accord with the Rite found in *The Order for the Blessing of Altar Servers, Sacristans, Musicians and Ushers (Book of Blessings, Chapter 62, #1847-1870.)*
- Liturgical ministries integral to sacred liturgy bring together in praise a variety of charisms shared in faithful service. Assuming only one liturgical role is encouraged. “In liturgical celebrations of each one, priest or layperson, who has an office to perform, should do all of, but only, those parts which pertain to that office by the nature of the rite and the principles of liturgy.” (ie. on a given Sunday serve one ministry. A music minister should not simultaneously serve as a lector or as extraordinary minister of the Eucharistic for example.) Please refer to the Diocese’s “General Norms for Liturgical Ministers,” no. 8.
- There is no specific term of service for liturgical musicians. Due to the distinct nature and training needed for their work, they may serve as long as they continue to receive training and formation.

The Choir and Ensemble in Liturgical Celebrations

- **Conscious and Active Participation.** “Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy. Such participation by the Christian people as ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a redeemed people’ (1 Pet. 2:9; cf. 2:4-5), is their right and duty by reason of their baptism.”¹⁰
- **Music’s Service.** Among the many signs and symbols used by the Church to celebrate its faith, music is of preeminent importance. As sacred song united to words, it forms a necessary integral part of the solemn Liturgy.¹¹ Yet, the function of music is ministerial; it must serve and never dominate. Music should assist the assembled believers to express and share the gift of faith that is within them and to nourish and strengthen their interior commitment of faith. It should heighten the texts so that they speak more fully and more effectively. The quality of joy and enthusiasm which music adds to the community worship cannot be gained in appropriate tone for a particular celebration.¹²
 - **Sacred Silence.** “The Importance of silence in the Liturgy cannot be overemphasized.” The choir and ensemble in its silence is an integral part of worship. Allowing the faithful time to fully experience God’s presence and to contemplate and worship in a listening 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

¹⁰ Sacrosanctum Concilium no.15.

¹¹ Sacrosanctum Concilium (CSL), #112)

¹² Music in Catholic Worship (MCW), #23 Bishop’s Committee on Liturgy, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 1983

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).

- **Liturgical ministers** are first and foremost members of the assembly. Their attire needs to speak authentically and respectfully of the role in which they serve at liturgy. Their dress should express reverence for their particular ministry, for the entire assembly, and for the sacredness of the celebration. Attire that would be worn for business or similar circumstances is adequate and even preferred for all non-ordained liturgical ministers.
- **Location** “Musicians and musical instruments should be located so as to enable proper interactions with the liturgical action, with the rest of the assembly, and among the various musicians. Ideally ministers of music are located so as to enable their own full participation by being able to see and hear the Liturgy. In most case, it will work best if musicians are in close proximity with each other—for example, by placing the organ console or keyboard close to the choir and to the cantor’s stand. “The placement of the choir should show the choir members’ presence as part of the worshipping community, yet serving in a unique way.”¹³
- **Musical Style.** With gratitude to the Creator for giving humanity such a rich diversity of musical styles, the Church seeks to employ only that which, in a given style, meets the ritual-spiritual demands of the Liturgy. In discerning the sacred quality of liturgical music, liturgical musicians will find guidance in music from the Church’s treasury of sacred music, which is of inestimable value and which past generations have found suitable for worship. They also should strive to promote a fruitful dialogue between the Church and the modern world.¹⁴
- **Language.** The use of the vernacular is the norm in most liturgical celebrations in the dioceses of the United States “for the sake of a better comprehension of the mystery being celebrated.” However, care should be taken to foster the role of Latin in the Liturgy, particularly in liturgical song. Pastors should ensure “that the faithful may also be able to say or to sing together in Latin those parts of the Ordinary of the Mass which pertain to them.” They should be able to sing these parts of the Mass proper to them, at least according to the simpler melodies.¹⁵
- **Language.** Whenever the Latin language poses an obstacle to singers, even after sufficient training has been provided—for example, in pronunciation, understanding of the text, or confident rendition of a piece—it would be more prudent to employ a vernacular language in the Liturgy.¹⁶
- **Organ.** Among all other instruments which are suitable for divine worship, the organ is “accorded pride of place” because of its capacity to sustain the singing of a large gathered assembly, due to both its size and its ability to give “resonance to the fullness of human sentiments, from joy to sadness, from praise to lamentation.” Likewise, “the manifold possibilities of the organ in some way remind us of the immensity and the magnificence of God.”¹⁷
- **Instruments.** However, from the days when the Ark of the Covenant was accompanied in procession by cymbals, harps, lyres, and trumpets, God’s people have, in various periods, used a variety of musical instruments to sing his praise. Each of these instruments, born of the culture and the traditions of a particular people, has given voice to a wide variety of forms and styles through which Christ’s faithful continue to join their voices to his perfect song of praise upon the Cross. Many other instruments also enrich the celebration of the Liturgy, such as wind, stringed, or percussion

¹³ Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship, II,B95 & 98

¹⁴ Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship, II.A.71

¹⁵ Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship, II.I.61.

¹⁶ Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship, II.I.64.

¹⁷ Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship, III.B.87

instruments “according to longstanding local usage, provided they are truly apt for sacred use or can be rendered apt.”¹⁸

- Although **instruments** are used in Christian worship primarily to lead and sustain the singing of assembly, choir, psalmist, and cantor, they may also, when appropriate, be played by themselves. Such instrumental music can assist the gathering assembly in preparing for worship in the form of a prelude. It may give voice to the sentiments of the human heart through pieces played during the Liturgy and postludes after the Liturgy. Instrumentalists are to remember that the Liturgy calls for significant periods of silent reflection. Silence need not always be filled. Instrumentalists are encouraged to play pieces from the treasury of sacred music by composers of various eras and cultures. In addition, those with the requisite talent and training are encouraged to improvise.
- **Recorded music** lacks the authenticity provided by a living liturgical assembly gathered for the Sacred Liturgy. While recorded music might be used advantageously outside the Liturgy as an aid in the teaching of new music, it should not, as a general norm, be used within the Liturgy. Some exceptions of note: Recorded music may be used to accompany the community’s song during a procession outside, occasionally; it might be used as an aid to prayer, for example, during long periods of silence in a communal celebration of reconciliation. However, recorded music should never become a substitute for the community’s singing.¹⁹

Conclusion (*from Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*)

As our Diocese with the Church in the United States, continues its journey of liturgical renewal and spiritual growth, it is hoped that these guidelines may serve to encourage further investigation and consultation of the documents cited with particular regard to *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* as an encouragement to progress along that course. The words of St. Augustine remind us of our pilgrimage: “You should sing as wayfarers do—sing but continue your journey. Do not grow tired, but sing with joy!”²³⁵

Approved: Bishop Felipe J. Estévez
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¹⁸ *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*, III.B 89 & 90

¹⁹ *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*, III.B 93 & 94