

MINISTERS OF LITURGICAL MUSIC GUIDELINES

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I. INTRODUCTION

“Among the many signs and symbols used by the Church to celebrate its faith, music is of preeminent importance. As sacred song is united to words it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy. 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 community worship cannot be gained in any other way. It imparts a sense of unity to the assembly and sets the appropriate tone for a particular celebration.” Music in Catholic Worship (MCW), 23

A minister of music, also referred to as a “pastoral musician” or “liturgical musician” in this document, is one who encourages and leads the assembly in their sung prayer. In order to foster and encourage full, conscious, and active participation of the assembly in the liturgical celebration, strong leadership in liturgical song is necessary. Choir directors and choir members, cantors, accompanists, and instrumentalists must be provided with formation and training

appropriate to their particular function. This document supplies basic guidelines for selection and formation of Ministers of Liturgical Music, and is intended for use by those persons responsible for parish music ministry.

II. THE ROLE OF MUSIC IN THE LITURGY

The Church's liturgy is inherently musical; thus, music is a necessarily normal dimension of every experience of communal worship. (Liturgical Music Today, #5). In the liturgy, however, music is an art placed at the service of communal prayer. "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 community worship cannot be gained in any other way. It imparts a sense of unity to the Assembly and sets the appropriate tone for a particular celebration." (Music in Catholic Worship, #23). Yet as the late Brother Roger, founder of the Taizé Community remarked, "liturgical music must be like John the Baptist: always pointing to Christ, never calling attention to itself."

III. THE ASSEMBLY AS PRIMARY MUSICIAN

The primary musician for the liturgy is the assembly. All other musicians are present at liturgy to support the assembly's song. All musicians are also members of the assembly. "The entire worshiping assembly exercises ministry of music. Some members of the community, however, are recognized for the special gifts they exhibit in leading the musical praise and thanksgiving of Christian assemblies."

We speak of the primacy of the assembly because they are seen as the primary presence of Christ; they are the Body of Christ enfleshed in the world today. "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst." (Mt. 18:20) ". . . Christ is really present in the very liturgical assembly gathered in his name, in the person of the minister, in his word, and indeed substantially and continuously under the Eucharistic species" (GIRM 27). It is because liturgical musicians are first of all members of this Body of Christ gathered to worship that they can minister to the liturgical assembly.

IV. SELECTION

The Ministry of Music is open to all baptized who have the ability to truly lead the song of the faith community. Based upon the need for knowledge of liturgy and the liturgical year and the ability to cope with the public nature of worship, a minimum age of 16 years is suggested. Exceptions may be made for younger people who demonstrate unusual ability and maturity. Parishes wishing to incorporate youth in the liturgical ministries may use this guideline in determining the readiness of young people to take leadership roles in music ministry.

The Ministry of Music includes cantors/song leaders, accompanists (organists/pianists), instrumentalists, choir directors and choir members. A Minister of Music should have:

- Musical ability – accomplished and skillful rhythm, tempo, melody, etc.
- Appropriate training and experience
- Degree in music if in music ministry leadership role (responsible for music ministry)
- Knowledge of liturgy, current music and principles for selection of music
- Ability to lead and encourage assembly participation in song and prayer
- Prayerful approach to music and liturgy.

Ministers of Music should be chosen to reflect the diversity of the parish community, and should include individuals of various ages, social and ethnic background; of both sexes, of the married, single, and widowed state.

The number of ministers should be determined by need. They should not be so few as to require service at multiple liturgies on any given day nor so many each does not serve at least monthly.

Ministers of Music should assume only one liturgical role at the liturgy. “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.” (CSL 28) (NOTE: While implementing this principle may be more difficult in smaller parishes than in larger ones, ideally a sufficient number of parishioners share their gifts as liturgical ministers. In addition to allowing an individual to develop more fully the competencies demanded in a particular task, such a procedure would call more people to service. Thus ministry would not be seen as something belonging only to a select few.)

V. FORMATION

All who serve in the ministry of music in a parish should attend special training sessions to become aware of theological, pastoral and procedural aspects of their ministry. Training of all Ministers of Music will focus on preparation for their major responsibilities. In order to assure that all music ministers have the opportunity to receive adequate training and formation, those who are responsible for music ministry in a parish should have further special education and training that prepares them to reach others. Having appropriate knowledge and training will help all ministers to function effectively and bring confidence and joy to their experience. The following principles are especially significant in this regard:

- It is important that all musicians be informed and guided by the liturgical documents: the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (CSL), Music in Catholic Worship (MCW), Liturgical Music Today (LMT), the Milwaukee Symposia for Church Composers (MSCC), and the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM).
- “[All liturgical ministers] must be deeply imbued with the spirit of the liturgy, in the measure proper to each one, and they must be trained to perform their functions in a correct and orderly manner.” (CSL 29)
- The responsibility for effective pastoral celebration in a parish community falls upon all those who exercise major roles in the liturgy. An organized ‘planning team’ or committee should meet regularly to achieve creative and coordinated worship with a good use of the liturgical and musical options of a flexible liturgy.” (MCW 10)
- “Musicians should use appropriate gestures for animating the assembly without conducting them.” (MSCC 69)
- “Those who assume musical leadership in worship need to balance their skills with an awareness that their musicianship is always at the service of the assembly. The nature of the liturgy requires a unique style of musical leadership: one that is, at its core, both professional and pastoral.” (MSCC 72)
- Subscriptions to periodicals such as *Pastoral Music*, *Rite, Ministry and Liturgy*, *GIA Quarterly*, *AIM* and *Today’s Liturgy*, can be very helpful. Membership in professional organizations such as the National Association of Pastoral Musicians is an ongoing way of continuing one’s education and formation. The following websites also have useful information:

www.npm.org

www.wlp.jspaluch.com

www.choristersguild.org

www.ocp.org

www.giamusic.com

VI. THE DIRECTOR OF MUSIC MINISTRY

Like all other ministers, the Director of Music is first of all a member of the assembly, one called to surrender his or her individual talents to the service of the baptized community. The role of the Director of Music Ministry is unique among the many forms of lay ministry. Often the director will have formal academic training in music, providing him or her with formal skills in both instrumental and vocal music. The director must also have a comprehensive understanding of the various liturgical rites, especially the Mass and the liturgical year. The Scriptures, in particular the psalms, should have a central role in the musician's formation. Finally, the Director should be able to make sound pastoral judgments, work well with a wide variety of people, and develop his or her own personal prayer life.

Some of the Director of Music's functions are very obvious: accompanying the singing of the assembly on Sundays, holy days and at weddings, funerals and other sacramental celebrations; directing various choirs, and serving as cantor. Planning meetings with the parish liturgy committee, presiders, school or religious education personnel, the adult initiation director, engaged couples, and bereaved families are part and parcel of this ministry.

While the Director of Music ministries usually has a very public role in the liturgy, much of their work is invisible to most members of the assembly. Choosing new music for the assembly or the various choirs can be very time-consuming. Preparing for choir rehearsals, scheduling musicians, rehearsing with choirs, cantors and presiders, personal practicing, budgeting, record keeping and professional reading are critical but often overlooked aspects of this ministry. The person in charge of choosing the assembly's repertoire must also be attentive to broader issues such as the quality of the sung texts, balancing various styles of music, inclusive language concerns, multicultural issues, passing on the heritage of the church's treasury of music, copyright laws, acoustical challenges, the needs of children and young adults, and the role of silence in the liturgy.

VII. CANTORS

The cantor's function is to lead and encourage the assembly in singing. Often the cantor has the special task of drawing all present into the proclamation of the Word of God through the psalm. "The human voice is the premier musical instrument in liturgical worship, and its basic repertoire is the psalms" (Fr. A. Kavanaugh). The cantor may also teach new music to the congregation.

Cantors also serve as leaders of musical prayer at funeral vigils and other sacramental rituals. Cantors need to be able to sing the text well with a pleasant voice.

Of all musical leaders, it is especially the cantor who requires direct visual and auditory contact with the assembly. In every situation in which the musical leadership has visual contact with the assembly, it is important to avoid a physical setting reminiscent of a stage or other entertainment venue.

VIII. THE CHOIR

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy emphasized that “Choirs must be diligently promoted . . .” (#114). “The choir remains at all times a part of the gathered assembly. It can serve that assembly by leading it in sung prayer and by reinforcing or enhancing its singing. Occasionally, the choir may appropriately sing alone more elaborate music that can aid the prayerful reflection of the congregation.” (Introduction to the Order of Mass, 18). Attention to pitch, tone, breath support and diction are essential for excellence.

IX. INSTRUMENTALISTS

“The organ and other instruments not only support and encourage participation through song but also, in their own right, can powerfully assist contemplation and express praise and a variety of human feelings before God.” (Introduction to the Order of Mass, #18)

X. COMMISSIONING

It is most appropriate that Ministers of Liturgical Music be commissioned for their role in accord with the rite found in the Book of Blessings, chapter 62, an “Order for the Blessing of Altar Servers, Sacristans, Musicians and Ushers.”

XI. CLOTHING

Ministers of Liturgical Music should be dressed in a way that expresses the respect and dignity proper to the ministry they exercise.