

Diocese of San Bernardino

General Liturgical Music Guidelines – (Revised Feb. 4, 2014)

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Introduction

“God has empowered 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,” Sing to the Lord (STL) #1.

Therefore, music plays a fundamental role in creating a celebrative environment and fostering full, active, and conscious participation in the Liturgy. Indeed, *“The full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else, for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful derive the true Christian spirit,”* Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (CSL) #14.

Music must be at the service of the Liturgy: Word, ritual, theology and spirit of liturgical celebration, especially in Sunday celebrations of the Eucharist in the parish. Careful attention is required to find balance in music so it may support the Liturgy without dominating the Liturgy. All people must be embraced and find their expression in the Liturgy through music. Song selection is a key factor to achieving this goal. In bilingual/multilingual celebrations, there is greater challenge in selecting appropriate music *“with due consideration for the culture of the people and abilities of each liturgical assembly,”* General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM) #40.¹

All ministers in charge of selecting music are urged to carefully study the entire music document *“Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship,”* published by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, and any other liturgical resources approved by the Conference, including GIRM, Roman Missal: Order of Mass, and the Lectionary. All contain important and relevant information and direction regarding the role of music in the Liturgy.

The following music guidelines are intended to provide music ministers with brief but essential key points and information on song selection and other aspects of music in the Liturgy, especially on Sunday, in the Diocese of San Bernardino.

The Three Judgments for Music Selection: Overview

Music selection requires careful consideration of the three important judgments: liturgical, pastoral, and musical, which serve to guide music ministers in appropriate music choices. *“All three judgments must be considered together, and no individual judgment can be applied in isolation from the other two,”* STL, #126. In the Diocese of San Bernardino, music chosen for Eucharistic Liturgies will normally be taken from music resources approved by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops.

¹ For further consideration of cultural considerations, please see *Sing to the Lord*, Section H: 57-60, in its entirety.

The Liturgical Judgment

The selected songs must meet the structural and textual requirements of the Roman Missal for each particular part of the various rites and elements within the Mass. *“A certain balance among the various elements of the Liturgy should be sought, so that less important elements do not overshadow more important ones,”* STL, #128. For example, the Gospel Acclamation and Eucharistic Acclamations must be sung utilizing the most recently approved texts.²

The Pastoral Judgment

The pastoral judgment ensures that selection of music, and delivery thereof serves and promotes the participation of the assembly in sung prayer. It is of utmost importance in multilingual and multicultural celebrations to give special care to determine if musical styles are inclusive and respectful of each cultural tradition of the assembly. The Church *“has admitted styles from every period, in keeping with the natural characteristics and conditions of peoples and the needs of the various rites,”* STL, #136. Ministers must also consider *“other factors – such as the age, culture, language, and education of a given liturgical assembly,”* STL, #132. *“The pastoral question, finally, is always the same: Will this composition draw this particular people closer to the mystery of Christ, which is at the heart of this liturgical celebration?”* STL, #132. Sometimes this Pastoral Judgment will suggest something as simple as choosing a song that is an old standard which most of the people will sing from their hearts memory, assuming it also fulfills the requirements of the three judgments.

The Musical Judgment

“The musical judgment asks whether this composition has the necessary aesthetic qualities that can bear the weight of the mysteries celebrated in the Liturgy,” STL, #134. *“Only artistically sound music will be effective and endure over time. To admit to the Liturgy the cheap, the trite, or the musical cliché often found in secular popular songs is to cheapen the Liturgy, to expose it to ridicule, and to invite failure,”* STL, #135. Music ministers are advised to select beautiful music, worthy of divine worship, but without a level of complexity that might compromise the people’s participation in congregational songs.³

The Order of Mass

Gathering Song

This song should create an atmosphere of celebration and foster the unity of all gathered. Therefore, a collective composition (using “we” or “us” and not “I” or “me”) is preferred, unless the song is a psalm written in the first person. When this song is well-chosen, it invites the singing of the whole assembly. In celebrations with more than one language, a bilingual or multilingual refrain is recommended, or the song should be sung entirely in the most commonly used language of the assembly to ensure greater participation. Rehearsing the refrain of the Gathering Song with the congregation before the Liturgy is highly recommended.

The song may reflect the message of gathering, unity, or the Readings, especially the Gospel, and be appropriate for the liturgical Season. Many of these aspects of the Gathering Song will also be expressed in the accompanying instrumentation.

The Penitential Act

The Lord Have Mercy/*Kyrie Eleison*, is sung, especially in Advent and Lent, although not always. For example, to give emphasis to the Glory to God in joyful Seasons such as Christmas and Easter, the Act of Penitence may

² See *Sing to the Lord*, #115.

³Most of the mainstream hymnals for liturgical music, in English and Spanish, contain predominantly (but by no means only) music which is widely considered appropriate and acceptable when considering the musical judgment. The use of these resources can also serve the needs of all three judgments. Some examples are *Ritual Song*, *Flor Y Canto*, *OCP Music Issue*, and *WLP/Paluch Music* resources. For some ministers, this may suggest a gradual transition from locally composed or non-liturgical praise music to music more appropriate for Catholic Eucharistic Liturgy. The Worship Office is available to help you with this transition.

be recited. When sung in a Liturgy with more than one language, singing *Kyrie Eleison* is highly recommended. This allows all cultures/languages to participate.

There are four other forms with appropriate texts that can be used (refer to the *Roman Missal*). The third form of the rite, in litany form, also facilitates the singing of invocations in various languages.

The rite must be omitted when the Sprinkling Rite takes its place. In this case, a song with an explicitly baptismal character may be sung.

The Gloria

The text of the Gloria may not be replaced by other words. *“It is sung or said on Sundays outside the Seasons of Advent and Lent, on solemnities and feasts, and at special celebrations of a more solemn character,”* STL, #148; GIRM, #53. Although it is preferable for the assembly to sing the Gloria, at least on the refrain, it may be sung by the choir alone. In a Liturgy with more than one language, the verses may be sung in different languages, with a bilingual or multilingual refrain, or it can all be sung in one language.

The Responsorial Psalm

The Responsorial Psalm is sung after a brief moment of silence following the First Reading. Since the Psalm is a Scripture reading, it is ideally sung from the ambo. If this is not possible, then it may be sung from a place visible to the whole congregation. To ensure participation, it is highly recommended to rehearse the response with the congregation before the Liturgy.

The proper or seasonal Responsorial Psalm is normally taken from the Lectionary. *“It may also be taken from the ‘Graduale Romanum’ or ‘Graduale Simplex,’* STL #158. *“Songs or hymns that do not at least paraphrase a psalm may never be used in place of the Responsorial Psalm,”* STL, #159. These songs with a paraphrased psalm, however, should normally be used only to facilitate the use of one or more languages or as a last alternative.

Ideally, the Responsorial Psalm should be sung in its entirety with the cantor/psalmist singing the verses and the whole congregation joining in singing the response. If singing the entire Psalm is not possible, then special effort should be made to sing the response and proclaim the verses. Adding soft instrumental background music to the proclaimed verses can enhance its poetic beauty. As a last alternative, the entire Psalm can be proclaimed. In a bilingual/multilingual Liturgy, a bilingual response is preferred. In the Diocese of San Bernardino, the verses may be sung or proclaimed in more than one of the most common languages used by the congregation.

The Sequence

A Sequence is a liturgical hymn that is sung before the Gospel Acclamation on certain days. On Easter Sunday and Pentecost, the Sequence is required... *“The Sequence may be sung by all together, or in alternation between the congregation and choir and cantor, or by the choir or cantor alone,”* STL, #166. In certain pastoral circumstances, the Sequence may be recited by the Lector or all.

The Gospel Acclamation

After a brief moment of silence following the Second Reading, the Gospel Acclamation is sung. When it is not sung, it may be omitted. *“During most of the church year, the Alleluia with the proper verse serves as the Gospel Acclamation. During the Season of Lent, alternate acclamations with their proper verse are used, as found in the Lectionary,”* STL, #163. In a bilingual/multilingual Liturgy, the singing of the *Alleluia* already unites the whole assembly; therefore, the verse may be sung in any language. During Lent, the response to the Lenten Gospel Acclamation may be bilingual or multilingual or in the assembly’s most dominant languages with the verse sung in any language. The cantor or choir may sing the verse but the whole assembly must sing the refrain.

“If there is a Gospel procession, the acclamation may be repeated as often as necessary to accompany the Gospel procession. The verses are as a rule taken from the Lectionary for the Mass,” STL, #161. The Alleluia (without the verse), may be repeated after the Gospel is proclaimed on special Sundays and other celebrations.⁴

The Creed

Preferably, in the Diocese of San Bernardino, the entire assembly is to recite the creed. Only on special occasions it may be sung with the following guidelines: *“If it is sung, it is begun by the Priest or, if appropriate, by the cantor or by the choir. It is sung however, either by all together or by the people alternating with the choir,”* STL, #170; GIRM, #68.

The Prayer of the Faithful

Generally, the intercessions and response are said. However, on special occasions, *“it is appropriate to sing the Prayer of the Faithful, or just the invitation and response, or even the response only,”* STL, #171. A bilingual or multilingual response is recommended in appropriate celebrations and may be sung in different languages.

The Preparation of the Gifts

This song may accompany the Offertory procession or be sung, even when there is no procession; it ends before or during the washing of the hands by the Presider.

This composition does not necessarily need to mention bread or wine. Most importantly, it should reflect the message of the Readings or the Liturgical Season.

The song may be sung by the whole congregation or, by the choir alone - especially when it is not available to the congregation in the hymnal. In a bilingual/multilingual Liturgy, this is a good opportunity to sing a song in a less dominant language or musical style. Instrumental music is also appropriate.

The Eucharistic Acclamations: The Holy (*Sanctus*), Memorial Acclamation, and Great Amen.

These Acclamations are of high importance since they are an integral part of the Eucharistic Prayer, the prayer which is the source and summit of the entire celebration. They form part of the dialogue between Christ and His people. Therefore, they should not be sung by the choir alone, but by the entire congregation. When an unfamiliar arrangement to these Acclamations is sung, rehearsing with the assembly before the Liturgy may facilitate greater participation. They may be sung in a bilingual/multilingual form when appropriate.

The text of these Acclamations may not be replaced by other words (see approved texts in the *Roman Missal*).

“In order to make clear the ritual unity of the Eucharistic Prayer, it is recommended that there be a stylistic unity to the musical elements of the prayer,” STL, #178. The musical arrangements to the Eucharistic Acclamations should be brief and simple enough for everyone to sing. No more than three different arrangements are recommended for regular use throughout the liturgical year so that they will remain familiar and readily singable by the entire assembly of people. These settings will be chosen with the three judgments front and center, including consideration of the rhythms and spirit of the Liturgical Seasons.

The Lord’s Prayer

The Prayer is preferably recited by all, especially in bilingual/multilingual celebrations. The assembly may be invited to pray in their own language. If sung, the traditional Gregorian chant is often a good option for many assemblies and is easily taught and learned as well. The *doxology* should also be sung. The musical arrangement must allow for everyone’s participation.

The Sign of Peace

“The brief period needed for the exchange of the Sign of Peace must not be protracted by the singing of a song,” STL, #187.

⁴ In the Diocese of San Bernardino, when the Bishop presides, the Alleluia refrain or the Lenten Gospel Acclamation refrain (in Lent) is repeated after the Gospel is proclaimed to accompany the blessing of the congregation with the Book of Gospels.

The Lamb of God or *Agnus Dei*

The Lamb of God or *Agnus Dei* is part of the Fraction Rite. The cantor or choir generally sings it with the congregation responding. It may also be entirely recited. The invocation may no longer be repeated multiple times. The first two invocations are "*Lamb of God, you take away the sins of the world, have mercy on us.*" The third is "*Lamb of God you take away the sins of the world, grant us peace,*" Order of Mass, #130. In bilingual/multilingual Liturgies, singing the Latin *Agnus Dei* chant may help to unite the entire assembly.

The Communion Song

The Communion Song begins immediately, while the Presider receives Communion, and ends when all the faithful have received the Sacrament. This song fosters the spirit of unity in the congregation – the Body of Christ receiving the Body of Christ, becoming more deeply and prayerfully the Body of Christ. "*Because the Communion chant expresses the unity of those processing and receiving the Holy Sacrament, communal singing is commendable. The singing of the people should be preeminent.*" STL, #189. A collective composition (written using "we" or "us" instead of "I" or "me") is recommended. Psalms already written in the first person are appropriate. Songs with a repeating refrain may also facilitate singing by the entire assembly. Rehearsing the refrain(s) to the Communion song(s) with the congregation before the Liturgy is highly recommended.

In liturgies with more than one language, a bilingual or multilingual refrain is recommended, or the song should be sung entirely in the most commonly used language of the assembly. In larger scale assemblies, if more than one song is needed, compositions in different languages may be sung, giving preference to the most commonly used languages by the assembly.

Preferred compositions for this rite may include "*themes of joy, wonder, unity, gratitude, and praise,*" STL, #191. They may carry the message of the Eucharist, the Readings, and especially the Gospel. They normally correspond to the liturgical season as well.

Song of Praise After Communion

A psalm or song of praise may be sung at times by all the assembly after the Communion Song. However, a period of silence is normally preferred at this time. If a piece is sung during a multilingual Liturgy, a song in a less dominant language may be given priority. Always inform the Presider beforehand if this song will be sung, especially if it is a Mass when the Bishop is presiding.

Recessional (Closing Song)

Although this song is not necessary, when sung, it most effectively will correspond to the liturgical season. Songs with themes of going forth and continuing our Christian mission are also appropriate. The whole congregation may sing the song. "*Other options include a choral or instrumental piece or, particularly during Lent, silence,*" STL, #199.

Other Considerations

There needs to be a balance between doing too much new music too often and doing the same music too often. In other words, a balance is important between a bold and adventurous song selection as well as well-known favorites and traditional music, assuming that all choices meet the demands of the Liturgical, Musical and Pastoral Judgments.

Normally, rhythmic clapping by the choir and congregation during songs should be discouraged. Instead, the congregation should be invited and encouraged to join in singing with the choir. Musicians are to favor and support the singing participation of the congregation by providing the correct text and music which follow the norms of the Three Judgments. This preference might be gently expressed by the Presider periodically, and printed from time to time in the bulletin.

The Ministers of Music

The choir, ensemble, psalmist, cantor, organist and other instrumentalists all make an important contribution in service to the Liturgy and congregation of every Sunday celebration of Eucharist and in other important parish celebrations as well. All who serve in these ministries are called to exercise music ministry as humble servants, willing to study and be formed in the history, theology, and spirituality of the Liturgy. *“Liturgical musicians are first of all disciples and only then are they ministers. Joined to Christ through the Sacraments of Initiation, musicians belong to the assembly of the baptized faithful; they are worshippers above all else...They need to hear the Gospel, experience conversion, profess faith in Christ, and so proclaim the praise of God. Thus, musicians who serve the Church at prayer are not merely employees or volunteers. They are ministers who share the faith, serve the community, and express the love of God and neighbor through music,”* STL, #49. Their musical, liturgical and ministerial competence is always expected and worked on with the support and assistance of the parish.

Placement of music ministers should take into consideration that their primary function is to enable and support the most full, active, and conscious participation of the congregation. All ministers are not “stars” drawing attention to their musical gifts and abilities. They are, instead, intended to “star less” as the Latin meaning of the word suggests.

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