



Wedding Guidelines - Music

St. Elizabeth Seton Catholic Church

5260 28th Avenue SW

Naples, FL 34116

The following guidelines have been developed and set forth to help with the preparation and celebration of the musical portion of the wedding liturgies. It is the Roman Catholic heritage and tradition that sacred music is integral to all Catholic liturgies.

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 an 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 congregation and sets the appropriate tone for a particular celebration. (Music in Catholic Worship #23)

The essential principle to be kept in mind is that music is a part of the liturgy. Thus, the compositions that are sung, the persons who sing them and the times they are sung are to be in accord with the liturgy that is being celebrated and with the general principles of the liturgy.

According to the statement by the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Liturgy, "Music in Catholic Worship", the following judgments are involved in selecting music:

1. ***The musical judgment:*** Is the composition good and artistically sound, whatever the style?

2. ***The liturgical judgment:*** Is the selection appropriate for the particular part of the liturgical celebration? Do the words speak of Christ, community worship, the mysteries of faith and love? Are the people enabled to fulfill their role in singing the parts especially pertaining to them? Is the music religious in its associations?

To help determine the appropriateness of any given piece of music, the following question should be asked: Does the music in question bring to mind associations of the theater, opera, movies, commercials, television shows, or other secular connections? If so, it is probably not a suitable choice for the liturgy, although it might be very appropriate at the rehearsal or reception.

3. ***The pastoral judgment:*** Will the piece of music help those in attendance to pray and express their spirit of joyous worship? If persons of other faiths will be attending, will the hymns selected include some in which all faiths are able to participate?

4. ***Theological adequacy*** must also be used in the selection of music. When judging musical texts for theological adequacy, one should be guided by the following wording from the

proposed “Directory for Music and the Liturgy for Use in the Dioceses in the United States of America” (USCCB, 2006), which in part, states that “Individual songs should be consonant with Catholic teaching and free from doctrinal error.”

An important criterion in selecting music is its ability to elicit a prayerful response for this particular community. When the sacrament of matrimony is celebrated within the Mass, the centrality of the Eucharist must be understood. In addition to the covenant love being celebrated, the unifying nature of the Eucharist should be emphasized. Everything else surrounding the ceremony should be supportive, including the music.

One should always remember that the organ and orchestral instruments have always been associated with the liturgy. “While the organ is to be accorded pride of place, other wind, stringed, or percussion instruments may be used in liturgical services in the dioceses of the United States of America, according to longstanding local usage, provided they are truly apt for sacred use or can be rendered apt.” (GIRM #393,2) In assisting the bridal couple in designing the music program, it should be noted that different combinations of instruments can be used effectively. The availability of instrumentalists will often be the deciding factor.

Opportunities for Music in the Wedding Liturgy (Please refer to your copy of *Together for Life*.)

Prelude

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy makes it clear that the members of the assembly are to dispose themselves to that which is about to be celebrated. Prelude music, therefore, should foster an atmosphere of prayer and reverential silence while members of the assembly are gathering and being seated. Several selections may be used; combining instrumental as well as appropriate vocal pieces.

Procession / Entrance Song

Music for the entrance song should focus the assembly’s attention on their role as active participants of the liturgy. The procession and entrance song should be appropriate. Whether instrumental or sung, the entrance song should be an appropriate hymn of praise or a hymn of petition, asking God’s blessing on the couple to be married.

Responsorial Psalm

The musical setting of any psalm is appropriate here, provided it is responsorial in style, i.e., the cantor sings the verses and the assembly responds with the sung refrain. Psalms 33, 34, 103, 112, 128, 145, and 148 are very appropriate for weddings. The psalm should be sung. Songs based on psalms which paraphrase the text of the psalm are not to be used in place of the Responsorial Psalm.

Gospel Acclamation

The gospel acclamation is always sung. An appropriate setting of the "Alleluia" or acclamation of praise during the season of Lent can be chosen.

Presentation/Preparation of the Gifts

Because in the context of a wedding this ritual action does not take a long time, it is important that music not be so long as to interrupt the flow of the liturgy. Often solos will do just that and place undo importance on this part of the liturgy. Instrumental music is highly recommended for the preparation of the gifts.

Eucharistic Acclamations

The Preface Acclamations, Memorial Acclamation and Concluding Doxology should be chosen from settings that are familiar to most practicing Catholics. As a matter of course, guests who make up the assembly often come from different parishes.

Communion Procession

The music for the communion procession should be Eucharistic in nature, i.e., expressing praise and thanksgiving and stressing our oneness in Christ.

Concluding Procession

The music at the Nuptial Procession is traditionally instrumental and joyful in nature. The style may vary from traditional to the avant-garde or from stately to dance-like. The operative words here are appropriate and dignified.

Liturgical Seasons

Music selections should be in keeping with the liturgical seasons, but not be in opposition to the liturgical season.

Other Music Issues: Recorded Music

In keeping with the General Principles on the Structure of the Liturgy, *Liturgical Music Today* (1982) offers the following guidelines on "Recorded Music."

60. The liturgy is a complex use of signs expressed by living human beings. Music, being preeminent among those signs, ought to be "live". While recorded music, therefore, might be used to advantage outside the liturgy as an aid in the teaching of new music, it should, as a general norm, never be used within the liturgy to replace the congregation, the choir, the organist or other instrumentalists.

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