

DIOCESAN GUIDELINES CONCERNING
MUSIC FOR THE CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGE



DIOCESE OF MANCHESTER

**Diocesan Guidelines Concerning Music
for the Celebration of Marriage
Diocese of Manchester, New Hampshire**

Diocesan Office for Worship

I. Introduction

Why the need for Diocesan Wedding Policy Guidelines? Couples need clear and concise guidance as to what is appropriate within the Church. Tradition has established that the Church is of God. Such an institution should therefore project God's love to the world, even though it must maintain standards to uphold in doing so. Every Church and congregation is unique. The elements that make it different from others have to do with the personalities of the leadership, ministers and people, the architecture of the building, the use of instruments and other factors. It should be obvious that what is written here is not policy. It is a series of salient points to consider carefully when coming up with your own parish policies. Thus these guidelines offer guidance and uniformity with regard to the essential music of Catholic weddings.

II. Catechesis

The essential principle to be kept in mind is that music is an integral part of the liturgy. "The faithful fulfill their liturgical role by making that full, conscious and active participation which is demanded by the nature of the liturgy itself and which is, by reason of baptism, the right and duty of the Christian people. The faithful should also be taught to raise their minds to God through interior participation as they listen to the singing of the ministers or choir." (*Musicam Sacram*, #15)

Since the wedding liturgy is a celebration of a sacrament, the music must reflect that sacramental character. The same general principles of planning worship and deciding on music are employed as at other liturgies. The music should be chosen with the utmost care and consideration for the sacredness of the liturgy. It needs to be explicitly expressive of Catholic faith and values.

- Music which only celebrates the human secular values of love is not appropriate in church.
- Secular love songs have no place in a sacramental celebration.
- Sung texts should reflect not only the love of man and woman but also the love of God for the couple and for all people.

Particular decisions about choice and placement of wedding music should grow out of the three judgments found in *Music in Catholic Worship* and explained further in *Liturgical Music Today*:

1. Liturgical Judgment: Is the music's text, form, placement and style congruent with the nature of the liturgy? Do the words speak of Christ, community worship, the mysteries of faith and love? What parts are preferred for singing and who sings them? The texts "must always be in conformity with Catholic doctrine, indeed they should be drawn chiefly from Holy Scripture, and from liturgical sources." (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, # 121) and again "Individual songs should be consonant with Catholic teaching and free from doctrinal error." (*Directory for Music and the Liturgy for Use in the Dioceses in the United States of America*, USCCB, 2006)
2. Musical Judgment: Is the music technically, aesthetically and expressively good? Is the composition of good quality, and will it also be consistent with the resources available? "To admit the cheap, the trite, the musical cliché often found in popular songs . . . is to cheapen the liturgy, to expose it to ridicule, and to invite failure." (*MCW*, #26)
3. Pastoral Judgment: Will the words and music help this congregation to pray? Will your choice of music have the same feeling of prayerfulness within the congregation as you have originally intended?

IV. Making appropriate choices for wedding music

In choosing which parts of the wedding ceremony are to be sung and by whom, pastoral musicians and couples should observe the norms for choosing music for any public liturgy. Thus the Principal of Progressive Solemnity is to be observed as outlined in *Sing to the Lord* (IV.A.115ff) which organizes the music of the Mass in order of importance:

"The above priorities should be followed as much as possible, in this order: dialogues and acclamations (Gospel Acclamation, *Sanctus*, Memorial Acclamation, Amen); litanies (*Kyrie*, *Agnus Dei*); Responsorial Psalm ... a hymn or even two." (*STL*, IV.A.116)

- a. dialogues and acclamations: Gospel Acclamation, *Sanctus*, *Mysterium Fidei*, Amen
- b. antiphons and psalms: Responsorial Psalm, Communion Psalm
- c. Refrains and Repeated Responses: *Agnus Dei*,
- d. Hymns: Opening hymn, Gloria in Excelsis, Preparation of the Gifts, Hymn of Thanksgiving, Recessional."

Sing to the Lord also notes that "Proper antiphons from the liturgical books are to be esteemed and used especially because they are the very voice of God speaking to us in the Scriptures. The Christian faithful are to be led to an ever deeper appreciation of the psalms as the voice of Christ and the voice of his Church at prayer." (*STL*, IV.A.117)

It is important to note that whenever a Marriage is celebrated during Mass, the Penitential Act is omitted and the Gloria in excelsis is sung or said. (Roman Missal 2010).

In order to facilitate congregational singing and the participation of all the wedding guests, a cantor should be engaged to help the people feel comfortable and secure with the hymns they will sing. The cantor is not a soloist but is someone who leads the worshipping community in sung prayer. "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." (*STL* II.E.37-40)

A vocal soloist may also be used at weddings. However, never should a soloist be engaged to sing in the place of the congregation. A good example would be the Lord's Prayer. The Lord's Prayer is to be said or sung by *all* present. It is never to be sung as a vocal solo either before or during the Nuptial Rites.

Please refer to our diocesan guidelines concerning the ministry of the cantor for additional information.

Instrumentalists and instrumental music add much joy to the occasion of the wedding and should be integrated into the overall plan of the music. Instrumental music should be performed competently and artistically and should not unduly prolong the rites. Preludes and postludes, as preparation for the celebration of the Sacred Mysteries, are subject to the same criteria of musical judgment as all other music for the Wedding ceremony/Mass. "There are also times when the organ or other instruments may be played alone, such as a prelude before the Mass, an instrumental piece during the Preparation of the Gifts, a recessional is there is no closing song, or a postlude following a closing song." (*STL*, II.E.44) Additional instrumentalists (trumpets, violins, etc.) may be contracted as part wedding music. These, however, should always be selected in consultation with the incumbent parish musician.

Pre-recorded music is never an acceptable alternative to the song of those present. The liturgy is a series of signs expressed by living human beings. In the marriage rite, two living persons exchange vows and symbols, indicating that they are becoming one new life together in Christ. The music used in the marriage should also be live. "Recorded music lacks the authenticity provided by a living liturgical assembly gathered for the Sacred Liturgy." (*STL* III.B.93-94)

III. Scheduling and timeline

In general, couples should be involved in the planning of the music for their nuptials, but they should always do so under the guidance of the incumbent parish musician and shall adhere to the norms of the liturgical law of the universal Church. Parishes should have a clear policy as to when the musical and liturgical planning is to be completed. Experience has shown that this portion of the wedding planning should be done after FOCUS is completed, but no less than 2 months before the ceremony/Mass to allow adequate preparation time for programs and to contract the musicians and to secure any copyright permissions that may be necessary.

IV. Participation Aids

Because weddings tend to gather a diverse group of people including both Catholic and non-Catholic, weddings should have participation aids or programs that invite the congregation to participate as fully as they are able. A program or worship aid also provides a thoughtful remembrance of the occasion. Programs or participation aids are not a script, but an instrument to help people follow the liturgy and to join in it. The program or participation aid should be attractive in appearance and contribute to the beauty of the prayer. Individual parishes should have a clear policy as to who creates and prints the program or worship aid. These policies should be consistent with the USCCB's *Guidelines for the Publication of Participation Aids*. Thus these programs should include:

1. Major headings.
2. Dialogues and responses.
3. Hymns and songs or hymnal references to these hymns and songs.
4. Communion Guidelines as established by the USCCB. (See Appendix B)



The program or participation aid shall not include the texts of the prayers, readings or vows. Any reprinted text in the program or participation aid must conform with national and local copyright laws. "Churches have a legal and moral obligation to seek proper permissions and to pay for the reprinting of published works when required, even if copies are only intended for the use of the congregation." (*STL*, III.E.150) The Diocese of Manchester offers a template for participation aids at the Office for Worship website.

V. Use of Parish Musicians and Fee Structure

Parish musicians may justly expect to be paid a stipend or fee for their service at weddings. Each parish should have a clear policy concerning the role of parish musicians for weddings. It is a common professional courtesy to offer incumbent musicians a "right of first refusal." In other words, they are given the first opportunity to provide music for weddings in the parish. Engaged couples should be strongly encouraged to employ musicians from the parish where they will be married. These musicians have the benefit of knowing what does and does not work in their own community. They also are comfortable with the instruments of the Church, the sound system and the acoustical environment. Parish musicians are at ease with the practice and style of the parish priest and deacons. Couples should also consider that most parish musicians depend on wedding fees to supplement their salaries. Guest musicians should have appropriate training, experience and understanding of the liturgy and marriage rite and should be engaged only based upon the judgment of the parish musician. All musicians, parish and guests, can rightly expect compensation for wedding services. Care should be taken to clearly indicate what is included in the basic fee or stipend and additional fees (rehearsal time, attendance at wedding rehearsal, etc.) are both appropriate and should be indicated so as to prevent the abuse of the services of the incumbent musicians.



Appendix A: Bibliography

- Champlin, Joseph, *Together for Life*, Ave Maria Press.
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- Covino, Paul, *Celebrating Marriage*, The Pastoral Press.
- Fleming, Austin, *Parish Weddings*, Liturgy Training Publications.
- Friedman, Greg, OFM, *Your Wedding: A Planning Guide*, St. Anthony Messenger Press.
- Graham, William and Molly Stein, *The Catholic Wedding Book*, Paulist Press.
- Griffin, James, *A Blessing Not Lost*, Diocese of Coumbus, OH.
- Hendrick, Kenneth, *Preparing the Wedding Service*, Liturgical Press.
- Marcheschi, Graziano and Nancy, *Scripture at Weddings*, Liturgy Training Publications.
- McCarthy, Floe, SDB, *Wedding Liturgies*, Costello Publishing Co. Inc.
- Simcoe, Mary, ed., *Handbook of Church Music for Weddings*, Liturgy Training Publications.
- Stevenson, Kenneth, *To Join Together*, Pueblo Publishing Co.
- Turner, Paul, *The Catholic Wedding Answer Book*, Resource Publications.
- United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Music Documents*, Pastoral Press.



Appendix B: Communion Guidelines

The following *Guidelines for Receiving Communion* must be included in a prominent place in all participation aids in the same type used for the responses of the assembly:

GUIDELINES FOR THE RECEPTION OF COMMUNION

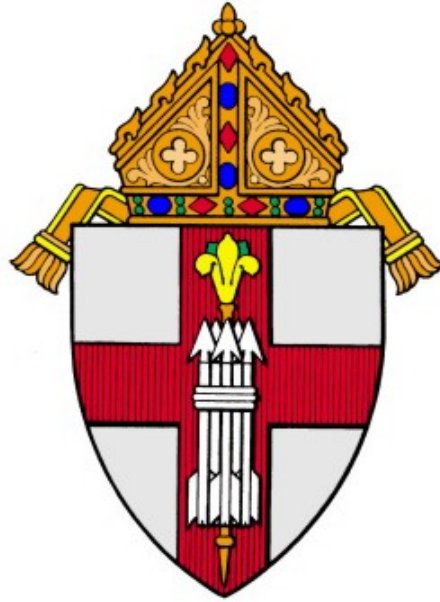
For Catholics: As Catholics, we fully participate in the celebration of the Eucharist when we receive Holy Communion. We are encouraged to receive Communion devoutly and frequently. In order to be properly disposed to receive Communion, participants should not be conscious of grave sin and normally should have fasted for one hour. A person who is conscious of grave sin is not to receive the Body and Blood of the Lord without prior sacramental confession except for a grave reason where there is no opportunity for confession. In this case, the person is to be mindful of the obligation to make an act of perfect contrition, including the intention of confessing as soon as possible (*Code of Canon Law, canon 916*). A frequent reception of the Sacrament of Penance is encouraged for all.

For our fellow Christians: We welcome our fellow Christians to this celebration of the Eucharist as our brothers and sisters. We pray that our common baptism and the action of the Holy Spirit in this Eucharist will draw us closer to one another and begin to dispel the sad divisions which separate us. We pray that these will lessen and finally disappear, in keeping with Christ's prayer for us "that they may all be one" (Jn 17:21). Because Catholics believe that the celebration of the Eucharist is a sign of the reality of the oneness of faith, life and worship, members of those churches with whom we are not yet fully united are ordinarily not admitted to Holy Communion. Eucharistic sharing in exceptional circumstances by other Christians requires permission according to the directives of the diocesan bishop and the provisions of canon law (canon 844, § 4). Members of the Orthodox Churches, the Assyrian Church of the East, and the Polish National Catholic Church are urged to respect the discipline of their own Churches. According to Roman Catholic discipline, the Code of Canon Law does not object to the reception of communion by Christians of these Churches (canon 844, §3).

For those not receiving Holy Communion: All who are not receiving Holy Communion are encouraged to express in their hearts a prayerful desire for unity with the Lord Jesus and with one another.

For non-Christians: We also welcome to this celebration those who do not share our faith in Jesus Christ. While we cannot admit them to Holy Communion, we ask them to offer their prayers for the peace and the unity of the human family.

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