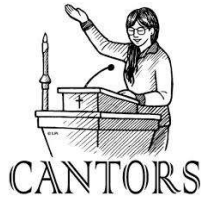


Music Ministry Guide

for Cantors, Choirs, and Musicians



Dear Ministers of Song:

Thank you for the glory you give to God and for your service to the Church and to our parish community. Singing is a most important element of Catholic liturgy. People enter into the mystery of Christ's presence by consciously and prayerfully lifting their minds, hearts, and voices to God. You facilitate this first of all by your own faith, discipleship, and awareness of the mystery of Christ's presence to which we respond from the depths of our souls.

This ministry at times requires sacrifices from you and your family, such as: taking time to learn and practice the Church's liturgical song, taking pastoral direction that may be different from that to which you are accustomed, showing up at inconvenient times when it is your turn, arriving early and prepared. I thank you for being dependable and cooperative, so that the community may rely upon you for inspiration. When circumstances make it really impossible for you to sing at the time to which you are committed, please be sure to get a reliable substitute in advance. No Mass should ever be left without a cantor, since the Church considers this ministry as one of the requisites for worthy celebration of the Eucharist.

May the Lord reward you many times over. May this little guide assist you in worthily fulfilling your important role. May you find joy in joining with the angels and saints around the throne of the Lamb to sing his glorious praises.

Fr. Larry and the Oblates of St. Joseph

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PURPOSE: The role of the cantor or choir is to motivate, lead, and guide the Christian faithful to enter into the Church's worship through singing with one voice. The success of this ministry is not measured only by how beautiful the cantor sounds, but rather by how much the people join in the singing. Musical accompaniment similarly exists to facilitate singing, not to overwhelm voices or to provide rhythmical entertainment. Music is certainly not to provide background for the spoken words, nor to break the silent pauses that are essential to praying the Mass.

PREPARATION: Remote preparation involves studying Catholic liturgy and what the Church officially teaches about the role of singing. The latest *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (GIRM) is the most basic document to be followed. An understanding of the liturgical seasons and feasts and the texts proper to them is essential for the proper choice of sung responses. In addition to the proper Psalm response and the text for the Gospel acclamation, the much neglected official texts of the Entrance and Communion antiphons help carry the theme of each Mass.

Proximate preparation involves arriving early for Mass, saying a prayer and readying oneself to pray and participate in the Mass while performing one's ministry. A hurried last minute approach or a prepare-during-the-Mass approach works against this. In the sacristy provide the priest with a list of what you plan to sing, and if there is opportunity find out from him which form of the penitential rite he will use, and clarify any other matters as needed. Be sure you have the texts for the intercessions and any other needed materials. When setting up sound equipment, try to move quietly and respectfully. If singing up front, be sure that equipment and cords are arranged in a way that maintains decorum and order in church, without interrupting the visual harmony.

The five or ten minutes immediately before Mass should involve a quiet prayerful atmosphere that people will encounter as they enter the house of God, aware of his sacred presence. When appropriate you may help prepare them to participate in the singing.

PRIORITY SINGING: Our goal is to provide our parishioners with at least one cantor for every liturgical service in our parish, whether Sunday or weekday, including baptisms, weddings, quinceañeras, funerals, and other special services. Even when Mariachi or other

groups are brought in from outside the parish, a cantor is needed to welcome and orient them and supply whatever parts they are not prepared for. At special services the cantor often must indicate to the people when to stand, sit, or kneel.

The most important parts of the Mass call for the priority responses to be sung. Besides responding to any parts sung by the celebrant, at the very minimum the cantor is always to sing the Gospel acclamation (*Alleluia*, or Lenten acclamation); the *Holy, Holy, Holy*; the Memorial acclamation in one of its three forms; and the great *Amen*.

Other parts led by the cantor include the entrance antiphon, the responsorial psalm for the Mass, the intercessions, the *Lamb of God*, and the communion antiphon. When not sung, the cantor may lead recitation of these parts. Other sung parts as agreed upon with the priest may include the *Lord, have mercy*, the *Gloria*, the creed, and the *Our Father*.

INVARIABLE TEXTS AND OFFICIAL CHANTS: The wording of the approved translation for the ordinary parts is “invariable.” This means that the words may not be modified or adapted, their order may not be changed, repetitions of certain words or phrases may not be added. Usually biblically based, the words are sacred, official, and unchangeable. Music is adapted to the words; the words are not adapted to fit new musical compositions.

Official chants are also provided in *The Roman Missal*. These chants join together the entire Catholic world. They are the pre-eminent form of singing to be employed at Mass. They should be learned before any other musical adaptations are employed, so that the people may learn them and join in the singing and be united with the universal Church. The options and possibilities are extensive in the missal. Hopefully you will learn and teach as many of these as possible to our people. For example, during Lent one of the chants for the creed could be learned to sing every Sunday. (During Lent use not more than one musical instrument, if it is needed to be able to keep the singing in tune.)

THREE FORMS OF THE PENITENTIAL RITE: In Form A (“I confess ...”) and Form B (“Have mercy on us, O Lord” ...), the *Lord, have mercy* may be sung after the priest’s absolution (“... bring us to everlasting life”) and the people’s *Amen*. In Form C the priest or deacon or cantor

intones introductory phrases, such as “You were sent to heal the contrite of heart: Lord, have mercy” to which all respond “Lord, have mercy,” and so on.

SILENT PAUSES: You are also to help facilitate the sacred silent pauses for reflection. Wait briefly after the reading before beginning the psalm response. Begin the *Alleluia* only when the celebrant stands. The offertory chant is to end as the bread and wine arrive to be placed on the altar. When the tabernacle is closed after communion, a period of contemplative silence is observed.

THE INTERCESSIONS: We will try to have a photocopy of sample petitions available each Sunday. There is a special cabinet in the ministers’ sacristy with materials for the cantor.

We do not add an intercession with a silent pause for each one’s personal intentions. Each person should do that at the beginning of Mass or at the invitation “Let us pray.”

The intercessions are for all our brothers and sisters throughout the world. We usually will not add individual names, but rather include such requests in the general petitions for all the sick or for all the deceased. You may, however, add a particular intention for retreats and events taking place in our parish community, such as “For all who will receive the sacrament of Confirmation this week, ...” or “For those living the Theology of the Body retreat this weekend,” You may pray for those who have died recently as listed in the bulletin.

You always add the single principal intention for which the Mass is offered as announced in the bulletin. Be careful *not* to phrase this as an announcement (“This Mass is offered for ...”), but rather in the form of a petition as follows: “For the eternal repose of _____ for whom this Mass is offered ...,” or “For _____ for whom we offer this Mass on his birthday,” or “For all our parishioners, for whom we offer this Mass ...,” or “In thanksgiving for favors granted through the intercession of St. _____, according to the intention for which this Mass is offered.”

St. Cecilia, pray for us.

