

**CHURCH OF
THE RESURRECTION**

OFFICE OF LITURGICAL MUSIC

**GUIDELINES FOR
WEDDING MUSIC**

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Congratulations! You have reached a point in your lives where you have decided to commit yourselves to each other before God and God's church. You will do this formally in the Sacrament of Matrimony. Your family, friends, and relatives, as part of the gathered, worshipping congregation, should be more than just witnesses or spectators.ⁱ The music selected can very powerfully shape the tone of the liturgy, and is one of the most significant ways to invite, engage, and encourage the full participation of the gathered community. The wedding liturgy is itself the most significant part of the wedding festivities, and the music should reflect the importance of the liturgical action. Certainly the engagement party, shower, rehearsal dinner, reception, and honeymoon are important parts of the marriage celebration.ⁱⁱ In the Catholic Church, an exchange of vows between two people is not a private affair, but a public act of God's worshipping community. The wedding, like all liturgies, is above all a dearly voiced celebration of faith. Music during the liturgy is meant to inspire, nourish and strengthen the expression of faith. Music should serve to unite all those who gather for the wedding celebration.

Music Selection

As you begin to consider music for the wedding liturgy, you should know that the same principles apply to all liturgical celebrations with music, whether a Sunday Mass, Wedding Liturgy or any other liturgical service. These principles are based upon three judgments found in the document *Music in Catholic Worship* and cited in *Liturgical Music Today*, written and endorsed as normative by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops. They are Liturgical judgment, the Musical judgment and the Pastoral judgment.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Liturgical Judgment: Is the music's text, form, placement and style congruent with the nature of the liturgy? Does the music express praise of God and the Sacramental encounter with Christ? The music chosen should not interrupt or delay the rite.

The Musical Judgment: Is the music technically, esthetically and expressively good, irrespective of the musical idiom or style? Does it move the congregation to prayer? The music should be expressive, but not showy, or overly sentimental to the point that it draws attention away from the Liturgical action.

The Pastoral Judgment: Does the music fit this place, this congregation, this Event? Will it help this assembly to pray? These judgments are the basis for the following guidelines and policies regarding wedding music.

Congregational Participation

In selecting music, you should consider that one of the best ways to unite and "help this assembly to pray" is by including congregational singing. At the very least, the responsorial psalm, Alleluia/Gospel acclamation and Eucharistic acclamations should be sung by the entire worshipping community. It is

appropriate and can be very successful to include congregational singing during the processional rite, preparation of the gifts and communion. A printed program with hymns, or music titles with hymn book selection numbers are very appropriate for a wedding liturgy, they encourage congregational singing and participation. In order to reprint or include the actual music in a program, copyright permissions are needed, but these can easily be acquired, usually at no charge, due to the one-time usage.

Popular Music

Sometimes couples want to include popular songs or theatrical instrumental works in a Wedding Liturgy. Music composed for social entertainment is not “congruent with the nature of the liturgy.” This music may have a “catchy” tune, be well known to the assembled congregation, and contain attractive or sometimes emotional affections. Even if certain pieces have “special meaning” to the couple, they are inappropriate when thoughtfully and carefully considered against the liturgical judgments.

The Constitution on Sacred Liturgy states that “The texts intended to be sung must always be in conformity with catholic doctrine; indeed they should be drawn chiefly from holy scripture and from liturgical sources.”^{iv} Usually texts in popular music are not drawn from Holy Scripture and liturgical sources. Often they deal with a personal dialogue between two lovers, and the effect is to undermine rather than celebrate the communal and public dimension of worship. In addition, such songs neglect and ignore the fundamental nature of Christian Marriage, that is, a celebration of God’s love for the church enfleshed in Christ, forming the foundation for the love a man and woman share. Finally, the texts violate the form of liturgical language, since they neither represent God speaking to humans, nor humans addressing God.^v This is not a judgment that all popular songs are inherently bad, but rather a realization that they are more appropriate at a wedding reception where they will help celebrate other dimensions of the wedding. To include popular love songs and music composed for the purpose of social entertainment in a Catholic Wedding Liturgy would be to misunderstand the nature and intent of the sacrament and serves to dilute its sacredness and unique beauty.^{vi}

Pre-recorded Music

The use of recorded selections reduces the gathered assembly to observers not fully engaged in the prayer of the moment. It replaces the music minister(s), the cantor, soloist, organist or instrumentalist with impersonal electronic devices. Pre-recorded music can never become a substitute for the community’s song.^{vii}

Who Will Be At The Service

Taking into account those who will be present, you can select music that maximizes the chance that all will want to, and be able to, join in singing. This judgment takes into account the number present and their background and heritage. The parish Music Director can also help you by suggesting music that is

appropriate to the season of the church year in which the wedding will take place (for example, Christmas or Easter).^{viii}

The Structure Of The Liturgy

The role of music in a wedding becomes clear by considering the following liturgical outline. Sung music is essential at certain points in the liturgy. When a Nuptial Mass is celebrated, the function and placement of the music is virtually the same as it would be for a Sunday liturgy. The following is an outline of the mass parts of the wedding liturgy, showing where music should be used to support community prayer. Those sections marked with an asterisk (*) are only sections involving music in a Wedding Ceremony (apart from a Mass).

- ** *Prelude Music:* As the congregation gathers, it should be greeted by music that helps it join together as a worshipping community, prepared to enter into the celebration. Instrumental selections or vocal solos may be offered at this point.
- ** *Processional:* The entrance procession is ceremonial movement that involves the bride and groom, the members of the wedding party and liturgical ministers. It symbolizes the Christian journey into new life.^{ix}
- ** *Gathering Song (Optional):* After the processional ends and an instrumental arrangement was used for the processional, a joyful hymn of praise helps gather the people as a praying assembly. It also encourages the assembly to focus its attention on the liturgy and its participatory role.

Liturgy of the Word

The Responsorial Psalm and the Gospel Acclamation are essential sung elements of the Liturgy of the Word; both call for an assembly song and both are led by a cantor, a singer who has been trained to encourage congregational singing. Unless the soloist is comfortable leading a congregation or has been trained in the ministry of cantor, a cantor needs to be present, even if a soloist has been engaged.^x

- ** *Responsorial Psalm:* The psalm forms the congregation's response to the first reading. Texts are taken from the Book of Psalms in the Bible. By tradition, the psalm usually consists of a brief refrain sung by everyone, alternated with verses sung by the cantor. Songs that are not psalms or based on psalm texts should not be used.
- ** *Gospel Acclamation:* A joyful acclamation prepares the congregation for the proclamation of the Gospel. A cantor should always lead the congregation in a familiar or easy to sing setting of an Alleluia (except in Lent). IF THE ACCLAMTION IS NOT SUNG IT SHOULD BE OMITTED.

Liturgy of the Eucharist

Preparation of the Gifts: The rite consists of simply bringing the gifts to the altar and preparing the bread and wine for sacrifice.^{xi} The instrumental or vocal music should not extend past the time necessary to perform the ritual action.

Eucharistic Prayer: The three acclamations during the Eucharistic prayer are: the “Holy, Holy,” “Memorial Acclamation,” and “Great Amen.” These are the “preeminent sung prayers of the Eucharistic Liturgy.”^{xii} They do not accompany any action; they are the prayer of the moment. Any musical setting of these texts chosen must be singable by the congregation. Unless the couple requests a specific setting that will be well known to most of the assembly, this choice can be best made by the Parish Music Director. The cantor is to lead the congregation in these sung acclamations.

Communion Rite

** The Lord’s Prayer: The Lord’s Prayer is the universal Christian prayer. It is appropriate that all Christians present be able to join in this prayer. Since Jesus himself taught that all should pray it, the Lord’s Prayer should never be sung by a soloist alone. In practice, it is normally spoken at weddings.

Lamb of God: This is a spoken or sung litany that accompanies the Breaking of the Bread. Usually the cantor leads the invocations followed by the congregations response: “have mercy on us/grant us peace.”

Communion Procession: One of the dearest signs of unity within the wedding liturgy is when the bride and groom receive the Eucharist, followed by the faithful who have gathered for the celebration.^{xiii} Congregational song during the communion procession supports and models this action of unity. A well known responsorial style song with an easily remembered refrain enables the congregation in singing. The text should speak of unity, praise, or Christ’s presence in the Eucharist.^{xiv}

Concluding Rite

** Recessional: A recessional is never an essential piece of music at a liturgy, but it can give a festive ending to the celebration.^{xv} Often this can be an exuberant instrumental selection. Including a congregational song or hymn of rejoicing can also powerfully conclude the liturgy.

Optional Additional Rites

Sometimes rites representing meaningful cultural celebrations are inserted to the wedding liturgy. These may include a unity candle or visitation to a church shrine such as the statue of the Blessed Mother. Music fitting the above criteria or silence can accompany the action.

Conclusion:

There are many choices to be made. We hope these guidelines will help you feel more knowledgeable, prepared and comfortable as you turn to your pastor and parish music director.

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- ⁱ “Guidelines for Music in Catholic Worship in the Archdiocese of New York.” New York: 1984. p.15
- ⁱⁱ “Your Wedding Music” Chicago: Liturgy Training Publication, 1993.
- ⁱⁱⁱ “Liturgical Music Today” 29.
- ^{iv} “ Constitution on Sacred Liturgy”, 121.
- ^v “Wedding Music Guidelines.” Hartford: Commission for Sacred Liturgy and Sacred Music, Archdiocese of Hartford. 1980.
- ^{vi} Anderson, David; Kunde-Anderson, Mary Beth. “Handbook of Church Music for Weddings.” Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1998.
- ^{vii} “Liturgical Music Today “, 61.
- ^{viii} “Your Wedding Music” Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993
- ^{ix} “Wedding Music Guidelines, Revised” Hartford: Commission of Sacred Liturgy and Sacred Music Archdiocese of Hartford, 1988.
- ^x “Your Wedding Music” Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993
- ^{xi} “Music in Catholic Worship,” 46.
- ^{xii} “Liturgical Music Today,” 17.
- ^{xiii} “Wedding Music Guidelines, Revised” Hartford: Commission of Sacred Liturgy and Sacred Music Archdiocese of Hartford, 1988.
- ^{xiv} “Wedding Music Guidelines, Revised” Hartford: Commission of Sacred Liturgy and Sacred Music Archdiocese of Hartford, 1988.
- ^{xv} “Your Wedding Music” Chicago: Liturgy Training Publications, 1993