



# Guidelines for Musicians

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 are to derive the true Christian spirit.” *Sacrosanctum Concilium 14*

Sacrosanctum Concilium calls for the ‘full and active participation’ of all the people and says that this ‘is the aim to be considered before all else.’ These are strong words and speak directly to the work of parish musicians. The ‘aim to be considered before all else,’ gives us two things to think about.

What texts will lead to full and active participation in the music of the mass?

What can musicians do to engage an assembly fully in song?

Music has a function in the celebration of the Mass. The function of each musical part is identified in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal. ‘The ritual dimension of sacred music refers to those ways in which it is ‘connected with the liturgical action’ so that it accords with the structure of the liturgy.’ STTL 68

**Connecting the ritual dimension of sacred music - to the liturgical action.**

## The Mass Setting

The Mass setting is one piece of music. It includes the Gloria, Gospel Acclamation, Holy Holy, Memorial Acclamation, Amen and Lamb of God. An assembly needs to be able to sing their Mass setting with confidence. Mass settings are best changed with changing Liturgical seasons.

## The Entrance or Gathering Song

The entrance / gathering or opening hymn has to

- Open the celebration
- Foster the unity of those who have been gathered
- Introduce people’s thoughts to the mystery of the liturgical year
- Accompany the procession of priests and ministers.

## The Psalm

We listen to the first reading. We respond to the first reading firstly in silence and secondly by singing the psalm. The psalm is a sung prayer. Ideally, it will be the psalm of the day that is used, but the GIRM does allow the use of Common Psalms. Common Psalms can be repeated over several Sunday’s They can be found in the back of the Sacramentary. Ideally, the psalm is always sung and it may be sung as a responsorial psalm as a chant.

“Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that fully conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy.”  
*Sacrosanctum Concilium 14*

### The Entrance Song

When the people are gathered, and as the Priest enters with the Deacon and ministers, the Entrance Chant begins. Its purpose is to open the celebration, foster the unity of those who have been gathered, introduce their thoughts to the mystery of the liturgical time or festivity, and accompany the procession of the Priest and ministers. GIRM 47

### Responsorial Psalm

After the First Reading follows the Responsorial Psalm, which is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word and which has great liturgical and pastoral importance, since it fosters meditation on the Word of God. The Responsorial Psalm should correspond to each reading and should usually be taken from the Lectionary. GIRM61

## Song or Hymn at the Preparation of the Gifts

- The purpose of music at the preparation of the gifts is to accompany the procession.
- The music ends at the time when the priest washes his hands this means the music may need to continue after the singing has ended.
- It can pick up words or phrases from any of the readings. It can help people to reflect on or meditate on the readings if this is done.
- It might offer reflection on the Church season or festivity being celebrated on that day.
- It should not be a major musical piece as this is a low point of the Mass. The Holy Holy has more importance.

## Communion Song or Hymn

At Communion, we eat and drink the Body of Christ and so we become Body of Christ, one holy united people. The Communion song or hymn has the important function of drawing out and helping us understand this unity that we have in Christ.

The Communion hymn has three main functions

- To express the spiritual union of the communicants by means of the unity of their voices
- To show gladness of heart
- To bring out more clearly the 'communitarian' character of the procession to receive the Eucharist.

It is important to note this emphasis on unity. The song starts while the priest is receiving Communion. The whole assembly joins in song. We sing as we move in procession. This gives assent to our unity. Music ministers go to Communion last. They need to time the hymn to end so they are able to take Communion with dignity and without rushing. On special occasions, there might be a hymn after Communion, say at Christmas, but generally when everyone has had communion, this is a time of silence. Once everyone has received communion, all are silent.

## Song or Hymn at the End of Mass

Mass ends when the people are dismissed - the Dismissal.

The hymn that we sing at the end of Mass, after the Dismissal is not mentioned in the Rite and so is not really part of the Liturgy. It is customary however, to sing a song or hymn at the end of Mass. Since this is the time when people are sent forth to take the love and peace, the nourishment they have received from Christ in to the world. If a song is included, it is best if it is one that helps people understand their mission to go forth in love as Christ's instruments of love, peace and service; a mission or sending theme. The hymn should be short.

### Preparation of the Gifts

The procession bringing the gifts is accompanied by a Chant (cf. no. 37 b), which continues at least until the gifts have been placed on the altar. The norms on the manner of singing are the same as for the Entrance Chant (cf. no. 48). Singing may always accompany the rite at the Offertory, even when there is no procession with the gifts.  
GIRM74

### Communion

While the Priest is receiving the Sacrament, the Communion Chant is begun, its purpose being to express the spiritual union of the communicants by means of the unity of their voices, to show gladness of heart, and to bring out more clearly the 'communitarian' character of the procession to receive the Eucharist. The singing is prolonged for as long as the Sacrament is being administered to the faithful.

However, if there is to be a hymn after Communion, the Communion Chant should be ended in a timely manner. Care should be taken that singers, too, can receive Communion with ease.

GIRM86

## Silence

Silence is the fertile soil in which the word of God might take root. Musicians need to be careful to create space for silence. The silent spaces as indicated by the General Instruction are;

- After the first reading (ie before the Psalm)
- After the second reading
- After the homily
- After Communion

## The Nature of the Liturgy and the Timing of Music:

To realise the beauty which is part of the inherent nature of the liturgy, the liturgy must be carried out in such a way that it flows from one element to the next. It is important that musicians understand the need for this flow and that they bring forth the music in a way that allows this to happen. Music is a servant of the liturgy. The purpose of music at any time is to support the liturgy, that is, to support the action, prayer or intention of the liturgy as we move through the Mass.

1. It is important to play music at an appropriate tempo. Music which is too slow or too fast hinders participation.
2. Much of the music requires an introduction of good length so that people may prepare to sing.
3. Acclamations are by their nature shouts of joy or affirmation, short sharp cries. They are more spontaneous and their introductions need to be shorter so that the liturgy can flow.  
Memorial Acclamation, Amen, to a lesser extent the Gospel Acclamation

## Māori Dimension

We acknowledge the NZ Bishops document Kaupapa Māori / Māori Dimension and the requirement it contains for a Māori Dimension to be present in the liturgy. This document asks that the Maori Dimension be included in liturgy. There are four aspects to the Maori Dimension; text, art, waiata and perspective.

In order to respond positively to this request, it is important that we include waiata, hymns in te reo. It is important to encourage our communities to learn some waiata and to maintain them in the parish repertoire. Parishes need encouragement and regular opportunity to practice these waiata.

### Silence

Sacred silence also, as part of the celebration, is to be observed at the designated times. Its nature, however, depends on the moment when it occurs in the different parts of the celebration. For in the Penitential Act and again after the invitation to pray, individuals recollect themselves; whereas after a reading or after the Homily, all meditate briefly on what they have heard; then after Communion, they praise God in their hearts and pray to him. Even before the celebration itself,  
GIRM 45

## Choirs and Musical Ensembles

Choirs and musical ensembles are encouraged. They need to take care that their musical leadership is in service of and supports the liturgy. The primary purpose of a choir or musical ensemble is to make it more possible for the assembly to participate fully in singing the parts of the Mass which properly belong to them. Care needs to be taken that the parish has a repertoire of songs which they are able to sing with confidence and that those in who choose music select from this repertoire.

### Repertoire

A parish requires a repertoire. Music needs to be regularly chosen from this repertoire. Sometimes the music ministry team might decide to introduce new music. This new music needs to be supported at all parish masses, played consistently by each musician and played each week for several weeks. Avoid introducing new music as an entrance hymn. Conversely, a music ministry team might decide that some of their music is no longer appropriate and 'retire' some of their songs or hymns.

### Choosing Music

The document, 'Sing to the Lord, Music in Divine Worship,' defines three principles to be used when selecting music. Each indicates an area of quality required by the music. These are;

- making a liturgical judgement
- making a pastoral judgement
- making a musical judgement.

### Choirs of Various Ethnicities

Parishes might be fortunate enough to have choirs of different ethnicities. This is a good thing and provides opportunity to grow in unity and in understanding of our diversity. While the principles of unity and participation remain important, these choirs need opportunity to sing some part of the Mass in their own language, perhaps the hymn at the preparation of the gifts or at Communion. Perhaps encouragement could be provided for the whole community to learn to sing some parts of the Mass in a language other than English.

### Visiting Choirs

From time to time, a parish might host a visiting choir. This is a good thing and provides an opportunity grow in unity and in understanding of our diversity. The visitors are really performing a ministry in the parish, much as a visiting priest might. In this sense it is a service to the community. The principles of unity and participation remain important. Music still needs to be chosen from the parish repertoire so that the assembly can participate fully in the Mass.

### The Importance of Singing

The Christian faithful who come together as one in expectation of the Lord's coming are instructed by the Apostle Paul to sing together Psalms, hymns, and spiritual canticles (cf. Col3: 16).

Singing is the sign of the heart's joy (cf. Acts 2: 46).

Thus St Augustine says rightly, 'Singing is for one who loves', and there is also an ancient proverb: 'Whoever sings well prays twice over.'

Great importance should therefore be attached to the use of singing in the celebration of the Mass, with due consideration for the culture of peoples and abilities of each liturgical assembly.

Although it is not always necessary (e.g., in weekday Masses) to sing all the texts that are in principle meant to be sung, every care should be taken that singing by the ministers and the people not be absent in celebrations that occur on Sundays and on Holy days of Obligation.

However, in the choosing of the part actually to be sung, preference is to be given to those that are of greater importance and especially to those which are to be sung by the Priest or the Deacon or a reader, with the people replying, or by the Priest and people together.

GIRM 39,40,41