



St. Mary of Magdala Church

An Ecumenical Catholic Community

GUIDELINES FOR SELECTING MUSIC FOR LITURGY

In General: Music Ministry involves hard work – understanding, careful planning, rehearsal, and attention. Liturgical Music is intended to work in concert with all the other elements of the Liturgy, creating a celebration, the rhythm of which is in line with the Liturgical Season. Think of music as needing to be in sync with the “beat” of the Liturgical Dance engaged by the whole community, and led by the presider.

Music should always enhance the liturgical experience and never work against it or stand out apart from it.

The things to consider when selecting each piece of music for a Liturgy:

- **THE LITURGICAL STRUCTURE**
 - At what part of the liturgy will this song be used?
 - What is the purpose of this part of the liturgy and does the song fit that purpose well?
 - The music chosen should work in concert with the rhythm of the liturgy and the effort of the presider who is by metaphor like the conductor of a symphony
 - Important: Be alert and attentive that all pieces come in on cue.
 - Important: Allow for the proper times of silence (no movement) between readings.
- **THE LITURGICAL SEASON**
 - During what liturgical season will this song be used?
 - Does the music fit the tone, mood, and environment which the liturgical season calls for?
- **THE ASSEMBLY**
 - Does the assembly know this song, have access to the music?
 - If not, will it be easy to learn and used more than once?
 - Will the assembly be engaged by the piece?
- **THE HOMILY**
 - Check with the preside or homilist – does the music you are selecting fit well with the homily being crafted? Does the preside have a suggestion?

- THE MUSICAL SELECTION ITSELF
 - Is this piece of music well-crafted? (ie, well-put-together melody, yet not too complex; lyrics that fit the criteria mentioned above and are neither trite nor exclusive)
 - Is it easy for the assembly to learn? Choosing a new piece of music should mean that you will use it again and that it should be taught to the assembly before Mass begins.
 - Will it stand the test of time?
- ALL VERSES SHOULD BE SUNG
 - All verses of songs should be sung with very rare exceptions. Songs with 8 verses or more should not be used in their entirety. If a very lengthy piece (eg 8 verses) is chosen it may be suitable to do the first four verses for Gathering and the last four verses for closing
- THE LENGTH OF THE LITURGY
 - If this is a lengthy liturgy it will be important to make musical selections that do not add unnecessarily to the overall length

Things not to do:

- Do not select music based simply on its similarity to the readings
- Do not select simply because that music repeats the text of a reading
- Do not select music solely because someone “likes” it
- Do not select music that is done simply for performance (there may be appropriate moments during a liturgy for someone to sing a meditative piece or perform a solo, but these must be done to enhance the whole liturgy, not to stand out; here is a good rule of thumb: if, when the piece is finished, it seems to call for applause – it failed as a liturgical piece.
- What about when people applaud at the end of a liturgy? Join them – the applause is acceptable as a response to what we have all just successfully celebrated – **not** as a response to music which stood apart from what was celebrated
- Do not select music that is beyond the capacity of the assembly or for which they have no access to music and lyrics (exceptions here are pieces with simple refrains that can be repeated, like response psalms)

CHOOSING EACH MUSICAL PIECE FOR THE LITURGY:

Gathering Song:

- It's main function is to help us shift our focus from our individual preoccupations to our shared faith in Christ Jesus. It accomplishes this by joining our voices as one in sung prayer. It should always be something familiar to the people, a song in which all can join in. Lyrics should speak to who we are and/or what we are here for.
- During ordinary time it should normally be more upbeat than reflective.

Penitential Rite is sung only during Lent.

Gloria is sung only during Christmas or Easter Season.

The Psalm Response

- This is usually taken from the Psalms, and should always be sung. It should be led by a cantor from the ambo. The song chosen should be based on whatever the Psalm is for that week's readings.
- The piece used should have a clear and easy refrain that the assembly can repeat after the cantor. Again, the refrain should be the same as that from the Lectionary for that week. The assembly does not normally sing the verses – these are left to the cantor and/or choir.
- The proper order is: the cantor sings the refrain – then gestures the assembly to repeat it.
- In those rare times that a hymn is chosen it should be neither cumbersome nor long
- **Music ministers and cantor should wait at least 20 seconds after the lector has been seated before moving into place and beginning the psalm**

The Gospel Acclamation

- Commonly called the "Alleluia" this is sung during the Procession of the Book of Gospels just before the proclamation of the Gospel.
- **Music ministers and cantor should wait at least 20 seconds after the lector has been seated before moving into place and beginning the psalm**
- It should be a joyful and uplifting with the "Alleluia" refrain easy enough for the assembly to respond to. Again, the cantor sings the refrain through once, then gestures for the assembly to join in. (The cantor leads this piece from the music area)
- The piece chosen should have a variety of verses that can be changed from week to week
 - Note: At St. Mary of Magdala we use a different set of Mass Parts for each Liturgical Season so that each season has a different feel to it and still people can know the Mass Parts chosen. See "Mass Parts" below.

Preparation of the Table

- This is a transitional moment in the Liturgy. The Liturgy of the Word ends with the Prayers of Petition. We do the Sign of Peace before preparing the Altar for the Liturgy of the Eucharist.
- There is a lot of latitude for this selection. It can be meditative, or lively. Mostly it should not be ponderous or long. About 3 minutes maximum. It can pick up on a

theme from the homily, or its lyrics can be Eucharistic in theme. It can be just an instrumental piece.

Communion Song

- This musical selection also has some latitude but should primarily be reflective in tone
- Its lyrics should touch on the Eucharist in some way or other – it can do this by referencing bread, wine, unity, the Body of Christ, or service, justice or peace.
- It is most effective if it has a refrain that is easy to repeat or lines that are repetitive – this way the assembly can still participate even if processing to receive the Eucharist

Closing Song

- The purpose of this song is to wrap up the liturgy and send us forth joyfully in God's service. The tone of this piece in most seasons should be uplifting and the lyrics should speak to going forth to live out what we have just celebrated
- Other appropriate themes are going forth in God's Love, or God's protection
- During Lent the tone of the song can be more reflective

MASS PARTS OR SERVICE MUSIC

- The Gospel Acclamation
 - This piece should be sung or not used at all. It should never be spoken.
 - During all seasons this is the alleluia. The proper form is for the cantor/music leader to sing it first; then the assembly repeats it; then the cantor/music leader sings the verse; then all repeat the alleluia once or maybe twice
 - This piece accompanies the procession with the Book of Gospels
 - During the season of Lent the word "alleluia" is not said or sung. There are special Lenten Gospel Acclamations that are used

OTHER MASS PARTS INCLUDE

- Holy Holy
- Memorial Acclamation
- The Great Amen
- The Lamb of God

AT ST. MARY OF MAGDALA we use a different set of Mass Parts for each season and repeat the same ones year after year. This allows people to get used to each set for each season and sing it well.