

Wedding Music Guidelines for the Archdiocese of San Francisco

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Editor's Note

The following Wedding Music Guidelines for the Archdiocese of San Francisco were prepared by the Music Committee of the Worship Commission of the Archdiocese of San Francisco. They were approved by the Worship Commission at its June 2008 meeting. Consequently, they were referred to Most Reverend William J. Justice, Auxiliary Bishop and Vicar General for final review and approval, which was granted in April 2009.

Abbreviations used in these Guidelines:

GIRM *General Instruction of the Roman Missal*
STL *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*

Introduction

1. This document is directed to music directors and pastors of the Archdiocese. Its purpose is to help musicians plan a dignified, joyful celebration and to ensure the sacredness and integrity of all music utilized at wedding liturgies.

2. This is not a document for the engaged couple. However, a sample companion set of guidelines that could be presented to the couple has been prepared and is available from the archdiocesan Office of Worship.

3. Each parish of the Archdiocese of San Francisco is encouraged to develop its own particular wedding music policy based on these archdiocesan guidelines. Any parish seeking assistance in setting up its own policy is asked to contact the Music Committee of the Archdiocesan Worship Commission for guidance. In the individual parish policy, more can be said about which pieces of music are familiar and suitable to the parish as well as to the wedding liturgy in that particular setting. It can also list musicians who are available to minister at weddings in the parish.

4. The individual parish policy may also address cultural elements which the Church recognizes to be legitimate variations for the Rite. In some cultures, certain symbols or rituals may be added to the liturgy. They give a cultural identity to the celebration but are not essential to the Rite of Marriage. Music may be used to accompany these additions, as long as it does not diminish those parts that are essential to the Rite.

Musicians and the Wedding Liturgy

5. Parish musicians are to be the first choice as wedding music ministers because they know the parish, its church, its instruments, the assembly's repertoire, etc. Moreover, these same musicians depend on weddings each year as part of their supplemental income. As a matter of justice and respect for them, their priority for service at weddings in the parish should not be ignored.

6. Musicians must be aware that they are not on stage nor are they there to entertain; their role is to serve the worship of the community. An individual singer is not just a "soloist" as such but functions primarily as a cantor, whose role is to sing the psalm and lead the community's song. "In all cases, soloists should be aware that their talents are offered at the service of the Liturgy" (*STL*, 221).

General Guidelines

7. Marriage is not just a civil contract but a vocation, a call from God to enter into a relationship that reflects Christ's own relationship with his Bride, the Church. A marriage ceremony in a Catholic church must reflect sound theology and employ the principles of good liturgy, whether celebrated within or outside Mass. The norms of the Church and the principles of good liturgy have priority over all other procedures, opinions and preferences. At the same time, couples deserve a clear pastoral explanation of these norms when their desires are in conflict with them.

8. As in any celebration, music in a wedding Mass or ceremony is a very important element. It is a most powerful communicator. Therefore, great care should be taken to choose music which is highly fitting and proper to this holy and sacred occasion.

9. The Church offers this guidance when choosing music for any wedding liturgy: "Particular decisions about choice and placement of wedding music should be based on [these] three judgments:"

The liturgical judgment: Is the composition capable of meeting the structural and textual requirements set forth by the liturgical books for this particular rite?

The pastoral judgment: Will the music help this assembly to pray?

The musical judgment: Is the music technically, aesthetically and expressively good, irrespective of musical idiom or style? (cf. *STL*, 126-36, 220).

10. The musical judgment requires musical competence. "Only artistically sound music will be effective and endure over time. To admit to the Liturgy the cheap, the trite, or the musical cliché often found in secular popular songs is to cheapen the Liturgy, to expose it to ridicule, and to invite failure" (*STL*, 135).

11. Rather than imposing a list of permitted or prohibited music, a process of dialogue with the couple will be an effective catechetical method and will avoid the pastoral difficulties often caused by such lists.

12. Couples are often unfamiliar with the wealth of musical possibilities that are available to them. The pastoral musician has a responsibility to acquaint the couple with the variety of music available which supports the meaning of the rite and is grounded in scriptural themes. All the music used, then, should be an expression of the worship of the parish community and the gathered Christian assembly.

13. Music directors may help the parish community develop a familiarity with appropriate music for weddings by seeking opportunities to include it (also appropriately) in Sunday Masses. When the liturgical calendar and Sunday *Lectionary for Mass* cycle present feasts and readings with, for example, themes of love, marriage, family, fidelity, or Christ's love for the Church, these would be good times to program a psalm, hymn, or other song that could be a part of the parish's developing repertoire of wedding music.

14. Of primary importance is what we celebrate in the Sacrament of Marriage: the mystery of God's love and human love in a covenant relationship. For these reasons, secular songs are not permitted in the wedding liturgy. Often times, a couple will request a song that is "their" song. After discussion, it may be determined that this song is best suited for play or performance at the wedding reception rather than during the liturgy.

15. Parishes may wish to gather couples preparing for marriage for a liturgy planning session, during which the parish musicians may demonstrate some of the musical possibilities. Alternately, pastoral musicians may wish to provide a tape or CD of some of the suggested music appropriate for the wedding liturgy. In churches with fewer weddings, the musician may wish to meet with each couple individually.

16. Live music must be used at every liturgical celebration. Prerecorded music is not acceptable for the liturgy.

Selecting Music for a Wedding Ceremony

17. Well-chosen music can draw people into the celebration with heart, mind and spirit in a way that nothing else can. The couple will want the wedding guests to enter into the celebration by participating fully in the liturgy. Therefore, the liturgy plan should balance music for participation with music for active listening.

18. When making specific musical choices, there are several points to keep in mind. Above all, the placement of the selections should be liturgically appropriate.

Introductory Rites and Liturgy of the Word

Processional and / or Gathering Song

19. An instrumental selection to accompany the entrance procession is appropriate. This may be followed or replaced by a gathering hymn, sung by the entire community. A song of praise or thanksgiving is appropriate and serves to involve the worshipping community and to set the mood for the celebration. Because of their secular nature, selections from operas, musicals, or movies are not permitted. Consistent with this, the “Bridal Chorus” from Wagner’s “Lohengrin” (“Here Comes the Bride”) is not recommended.

The Responsorial Psalm

20. The Responsorial Psalm follows the first reading and is an important sung part of the liturgy. The cantor sings the verses and invites the assembly’s sung response as at a Sunday liturgy. **Note: A song whose lyric is neither a Psalm text nor a biblical canticle cannot replace the Responsorial Psalm at any liturgy.**

The Gospel Acclamation

21. The Gospel Acclamation is sung before the proclamation of the gospel. Led by the cantor, the setting chosen should be familiar and appropriate for the liturgical season.

Liturgy of the Eucharist (weddings within Mass)

Presentation and Preparation of the Gifts

22. Instrumental or vocal music may accompany the presentation and preparation of the gifts. Music used here should not unduly prolong or delay the liturgy. A short vocal or instrumental selection is often the best choice.

23. The Eucharistic Acclamations “Holy” (*Sanctus*), Memorial Acclamation and Great Amen are meant to be sung. Choosing familiar settings of these acclamations will make it easier for the assembly to sing. The same applies to the Lamb of God (*Agnus Dei*) later in the Communion Rite.

The Communion Rite

24. The Lord’s Prayer is either recited or sung, whichever is most effective to engage the entire worshipping community. It should never be sung as a solo at this point in the liturgy; however a solo version of the Lord’s Prayer may be sung as a prelude to the liturgy, if so desired.

25. Following the tradition of the Church and sound theological principles, the text of the communion song should either reflect on the readings, the marriage rite, or the Eucharist. Any other songs, especially a version of the “Ave Maria” or another Marian song should not be used during the communion procession. Communion music should begin as soon as the priest receives Communion. The song may involve the assembly in the form of a simple refrain which invites and enables their participation. Alternately, the cantor may sing an appropriate selection, or instrumental music may be used.

26. After Communion a familiar song of praise or thanksgiving may be sung by all present, particularly when the assembly did not participate in song during the communion procession. No provision is made in the Mass for a “meditation” selection to follow Communion that is sung only by a soloist or ensemble without the assembly’s participation (cf. *GIRM*, 88).

Recessional

27. Instrumental or sung music may accompany the ending procession. The musicians are encouraged to continue playing as the guests leave the church building. Because of their secular nature, selections from operas, musicals, or movies are not permitted. Likewise, the “Wedding March” from Mendelssohn’s incidental music to the *Midsummer Night’s Dream* is not recommended.

Extra-liturgical Music

28. For marriages celebrated outside of Mass, an additional selection may be inserted (after consultation with the priest or deacon) after the exchange of rings.

Liturgy Documents

29. It is very important that parish musicians familiarize themselves with the following documents:

- *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (Third Typical Edition), 2002.
- Instruction *Musica Sacram* on Music in the Liturgy, Sacred Congregation of Rites, 1967.
- Roman Ritual: The Rite of Marriage
- *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007.