



# The revised GIRM

## and the Ministry of Music

### **A. What are the main points of the General Instruction concerning the Ministry of Music?**

1. The General Instruction places much emphasis on the importance of singing in the Liturgy. Although it is not always necessary in weekday Masses to sing all the texts that are meant to be sung, every care should be taken that singing by the ministers and the people is not absent in celebrations that occur on Sundays and on holy days of obligation.” (40)
2. In the choosing of the parts to be sung, preference should be given to those that are of greater importance. These are primary elements of the Eucharist: a) The 3 Eucharistic acclamations; b) the Responsorial Psalm (at least the refrain) and Gospel Acclamation; c) the Entrance and Communion Chants and d) the dialogues between the priest/deacon/lector and people. (40)
3. It is not permitted to substitute other chants for those found in the Order of Mass, such as the *Gloria* and the *Agnus Dei*. (366).
4. Gregorian chant holds pride of place. Other types of sacred music, in particular polyphony, are in no way excluded, provided that they correspond to the spirit of the liturgical action and that they foster the participation of all the faithful. (41)
5. The Liturgy of the Word is to be celebrated in such a way as to promote meditation. Anything that hinders recollection must be avoided. It is also appropriate to include brief periods of silence, in which, at the prompting of the Holy Spirit, the word of God may be grasped by the heart and a response through prayer may be prepared. (56)
6. The Responsorial Psalm is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word and holds great liturgical and pastoral importance, because it fosters meditation on the word of God. It is preferable that the responsorial Psalm be sung, at least as far as the people’s response is concerned. Hence, the psalmist, or the cantor of the Psalm, sings the verses of the Psalm from the ambo or another suitable place. (61)
7. The purpose of the Entrance Chant is to open the celebration, foster the unity of those who have been gathered, introduce their thoughts to the mystery of the liturgical season or festivity, and accompany the procession of the priest and ministers. (47)
8. When the priest receives Communion, the Communion chant begins. Its purpose is to express the people’s union in spirit by the unity of their voices, to show joy of heart, and to highlight the “communitarian” nature of the procession to receive Communion. The singing continues for as long as the Sacrament is being administered to the faithful. Care should be taken that singers, too, can receive Communion with ease. (86)
9. The GIRM mandates the Conference of Bishops to approve the choice of hymns or chants to be sung. In Canada, the options for the chants are: (1) the antiphon and psalm from the *Graduale Romanum* or the *Graduale Simplex*; (2) a suitable song taken from any edition of both hymnals *Catholic Book of Worship* or *D’une même voix*; (3) a liturgical song that is suited to the sacred action, the day, or the season, and that is approved by the Conference of Bishops or the diocesan Bishop. (48, 74, 87)

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This is one in a series of resources prepared by the Liturgical Commission of the Archdiocese of Kingston to introduce the 5<sup>th</sup> edition of the General Instruction of the Roman Missal and the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of the Roman Missal along with the new translation of the Mass in English.

Liturgical Commission



Archdiocese of Kingston

10. In Advent the organ and other musical instruments should be used with a moderation that is consistent with the season's character and does not anticipate the full joy of the Nativity of the Lord. In Lent the playing of the organ and musical instruments is allowed only to support the singing. Exceptions are Laetare Sunday (Fourth Sunday of Lent), Solemnities, and Feasts. (313)

## **B. What Ministers of Music are mentioned in the GIRM?**

1. The General Instruction refers to a number of musicians who exercise a liturgical role: a) The psalmist who sings the Psalm or other biblical canticle that comes between the readings; b) The choir that exercises its own liturgical role, ensuring that the parts proper to it are properly carried out and fostering the active participation of the faithful through the singing; c) Other musicians, especially the organist; d) The cantor or choir director who leads and sustains the people's singing. When there is no choir, the cantor leads the different chants, with the people taking part. (102-104)
2. Among all who are involved with regard to the rites, pastoral aspects, and music there should be harmony and diligence in the effective preparation of each liturgical celebration in accord with the Missal and other liturgical books. This should take place under the direction of the rector of the church and after the consultation with the faithful about things that directly pertain to them. (111)

## **C. What is the Place for the Choir and Musical Instruments**

1. The General Instruction states that the choir should be positioned so as to make clearly evident its character as a part of the gathered community of the faithful fulfilling a specific role. The location should also assist the choir to exercise its role more easily and conveniently allow each choir member full, sacramental participation in the Mass. The organ and other approved musical instruments are to be placed in an appropriate place so that they can sustain the singing of both the choir and the congregation and be heard with ease by all if they are played alone. (312-313)
2. Since the Responsorial Psalm is an integral part of the Liturgy of the Word, the psalmist, or the cantor of the Psalm, sings the verses of the Psalm from the ambo or another suitable place. (61)

## **D. Some Finer Points**

1. We do not sing at the liturgy, rather, we sing the liturgy, for the liturgy must engage the whole person. Prayer that is sung comes from the heart and not just from the mind. When ritual prayer is enshrined in music that is accessible, prayerful, and engaging - the liturgy is elevated to a true act of worship. Prayer is expressed in a more effective way when it is celebrated through music.
2. Music in liturgy is not about choosing favourite hymns, but about the worship of God and what will enable the whole parish or congregation to worship God.
3. Worship is not entertainment or nostalgia, rather it is an encounter with God. It is about prayer and how we allow God to speak to us and touch our lives during the Sunday Eucharist.
4. The more closely music is connected to the liturgical action, the more prayerful liturgy becomes. This promotes unity among the assembly with God, and allows the sacred rites to speak to our hearts.

## **E. Further resources**

A sample set of guidelines for liturgical musicians and other resources may be found at the Archdiocesan website (see Liturgy and Roman Missal).