



DIOCESE OF LINCOLN

CHANCERY

Dear Clergy,

With great love and reverence, the Liturgical Commission of the Diocese of Lincoln would like to offer thoughts regarding music in the liturgy and how to charitably pastor those in your flock who are in charge of or help with music. We acknowledge that we cannot know the particulars of every parish in our diocese, but between the members of our committee, we do represent many spiritual and musical backgrounds as well as experiences in a variety of churches and parts of our diocese. It is our great desire to help you, our priests, by offering ideas on how to help make music the best it possibly can be at your parishes as well as how to walk side by side with your parishioners in this task. Our vision as a committee is to collaborate with you and your musicians to elevate our liturgies to the most beautiful they can be for God's glory and the sanctification of your parishioners.

The Sunday Mass is the main point of contact you have with your congregants. As a point of evangelization, it is important to have as beautiful Liturgies as possible for your parish. Beauty is a transcendental element that can bring the people in your pews closer to Jesus. Beauty as an objective should not be taken lightly or thought of as "something extra." God deserves the highest honor we are capable of giving Him and beauty in the liturgy is one important way to achieve this end.

This letter's purpose is to walk side by side with you in two main areas: music within the Mass, and suggestions for pastoring those in your flock in regards to music. No one document could speak specifically to your particular circumstances, but we hope this will give us all a place to begin a dialogue regarding music in your parishes.

Sung Degrees of the Mass

The Church has offered three degrees of singing within the Mass, to be seen as an ideal towards which we are striving. They are listed as building blocks toward a fully sung Mass and add to the solemnity of the celebration. "...for the sung Mass, different degrees of participation are put forward here for reasons of pastoral usefulness, so that it may become easier to make the celebration of Mass more beautiful by singing, according to the capabilities of each congregation." (*Musicam Sacram* par. 28)

We encourage you to see these as guidelines that can help a congregation become better singers over time. Although active participation in the Liturgy certainly doesn't demand that the congregation sing, singing is a practical way to encourage participation and often heightens the solemnity of the celebration.

First degree: the chants sung in dialogue between the priest and the people

Second degree: singing the Ordinary (*Kyrie, Gloria, Creed, Agnus Dei*)

Third degree: singing the Propers (prayers specific to the day, including responsorial psalm, Gospel Acclamation, music at entrance, offertory, and communion)

Implementation of the Sung Degrees

The GIRM says "great importance" should be given to singing the Mass, and that while "it is not always necessary (e.g., in weekday Masses) to sing all the texts that are of themselves meant to be sung," that every effort should be made to make our Sunday and Holy Day celebrations the best that we are able (c.f. GIRM par. 40). While the first degree is the most important part of singing the Mass, we recognize that implementation of this degree is dependent on your comfortability with singing the celebrant's parts of the dialogue. Even if you are not ready to do this, please note that the second and third degrees can still be sung.

First degree: the chants sung in dialogue between the priest and the people

The first degree is the most important part of singing the Mass. Pastorally, singing the dialogue parts of the Mass (ex. "The Lord be with you" "And with your spirit" and "Lift up your hearts" etc.) creates a "culture of singing". Most people in your pews are able to sing a two note chant so this is a good place to begin with any congregation. In addition to the shorter dialogues, the *Sanctus*, Mystery of Faith (Memorial Acclamation), and the Lord's Prayer are also included in this degree.

Second degree: singing the Ordinary (*Kyrie, Gloria, Creed, Agnus Dei*)

If singing is to be added beyond the first degree, ideally these elements are next in line to be sung. This second degree represents fixed texts that can be learned over time, as they are repeated every Mass. The Church stresses that when singing the Ordinary, the words should remain intact (avoid settings with repeated refrains or changed words) and a unified setting is used. Bishop Conley encourages every parish in the diocese to be familiar with the simple Latin Mass chants (in keeping with GIRM par. 41), and many other options are available as well. The goal is to have a sung Ordinary in your parish that is used regularly enough for people to easily participate; it does not need to be ornate. Most Ordinary musical settings do not include the Creed, so at this time it is permissible, and arguably more appropriate and pastoral in our diocese, not to sing it.

Third degree: singing the Propers (prayers specific to the day, including responsorial psalm, Gospel Acclamation, music at entrance, offertory, and communion)

The third degree often requires a cantor or choir, thus being the most demanding. As stated in the GIRM (par. 48, 74, 86, 87) there are four valid options to sing during the entrance, offertory, and communion parts of the Mass:

Option 1: the antiphon of the day

Option 2: the more general antiphon of the season

Options 3 and 4: another suitable liturgical psalm or song.

These may be sung by the choir alone or by the congregation.

We encourage pastors to work together with their musicians to determine which options make the most sense for their parish. For congregations interested in implementing the antiphons, it has worked well in many parishes of the diocese to introduce the communion antiphon first and add the others later. Antiphons can be simply recited by the priest or congregation, chanted in simple plain tone chant as a call and response, or as a more complex chant by a choir. Another great option is to sing an entrance hymn followed by the entrance antiphon, or at communion time, to chant the antiphon and follow that with a hymn. We happily offer our services to work individually with your parish musicians if you need additional resources or coaching.

Selection of Hymns

When selecting hymns, we suggest you encourage your musicians to prayerfully read the antiphons, psalms, readings, and prayers for the day. When singing hymns alongside or substituting the antiphons, care should be taken to select a hymn that corresponds to the message or scriptures of the day. The GIRM upholds the use of chant and polyphony, but points us in our selection of other music with the instruction that “they correspond to the spirit of the liturgical action and that they foster the participation of all the faithful” (GIRM par. 41).

Not every hymn in our hymnals or missalettes is necessarily appropriate, so you can help your musicians notice which hymns may not have texts that conform to the teachings and doctrines of the Church, especially regarding the Real Presence of Christ in the Eucharist. Recent focus has been drawn to the use of the word “bread” in various hymns, and it is indeed sometimes problematic, but not always. Scripture and many ancient hymns and prayers have referred to the Eucharist as the “Bread of Life” or “Bread of Angels,” so the context of the hymn and phrases should be carefully considered. Similarly, hymns depicting a gathering or a meal with no mention of Jesus (or the fact that we are consuming Christ) should be examined. The focus of our liturgical music should of course not be on us, but the One we are present to worship.

When the hymn was composed is less important than the musical quality, which considers the singability (e.g. whether rhythm and interval leaps are accessible for the general congregation) and the suitability of the text.

Addressing Pastoral Challenges and Opportunities Regarding Music

Again, here our committee would like to tread with much reverence for the pastors and priests of our parishes. We offer our suggestions with charity and hope for you and your community. We will address two main challenges that many of you may face.

What if I, as a priest, don't feel capable of singing the liturgy and /or lack musicians to make beautiful music possible?

We recognize that singing the Liturgy can be challenging, especially when it has not been part of one's formation or practice. We are grateful for the willingness of priests to engage in the sung prayer of the Church in whatever way they are able. We want to offer you support and patience rather than pressure. Begin by asking yourself "what CAN we do?" Beginning with the small step of only singing "The Lord be with you" is a doable starting point for many. Another small step when incorporating antiphons is to first recite them, then later chant in plain tone (two notes). The celebrant or a cantor can do this. Implementing singing at Mass should not be overwhelming or frustrating, but guided by the peace and rest of the Holy Spirit. God blesses our human efforts to glorify him in whatever way we are capable.

Regarding a lack of capable musicians or lack of resources, we are all very well aware of this challenge and have encountered it in various ways. Some parishes indeed have few to no people capable of helping with music in the liturgy. Here, we again offer encouragement: ask "what CAN we do as a parish?" with a spirit of docility to the Holy Spirit's promptings and guidance. Any one small step of improvement makes a difference. If you find yourself at a parish which resists singing entirely, we encourage you to start small with the sung dialogue of the Mass - or even one part of it - when possible, as a first step. Neither your first step nor your best effort needs to be perfect.

How do I address liturgical abuses or musicians who are not interested in change in my parish?

Often you will encounter musicians who have developed longstanding musical practices, which can make new approaches feel unfamiliar or challenging. Some musicians have been serving the Church for years or decades for little to no compensation or affirmation. We encourage you to lead first with gratitude for the hours they have dedicated to the Church, no matter how imperfectly. Here we invite you to take a long term approach. Winning your musicians over with

kindness, understanding and gratitude can be an effective way to slowly foster change towards the end of creating more beauty in the liturgy. This cannot be emphasized enough. A humble and gentle approach will almost always be the most effective way to implement needed changes. Christ himself approaches us this way and we invite you to model this type of humility, especially since that same humility is what you likely desire from your musicians if you must correct them.

Certainly, you may find yourself amidst established musical practices that are not consistent with the Church's liturgical directives and may require prudent and charitable correction. Musical practices that are directly contrary to liturgical norms and the guidance of Holy Mother Church should be corrected in an intentional and charitable way. A quick and heavy handed change in adopted practices at a church can result in frustration for the pastor and musicians alike. We invite you to present the Church's vision for the Liturgy to your musicians with grace. Often explaining the "why" behind changes (or acknowledging that in many cases an unacceptable practice began long ago and it wasn't the musicians' fault that it was allowed to continue) can be effective in getting everyone moving in the same direction. Liturgy which glorifies God and sanctifies the people is an opportunity for your parishioners to meet Jesus in a profound way. In order to move towards this, your musicians must feel seen, loved, and heard, even if you, their pastor, disagrees with them, or even if they are simply wrong.

Conclusion

Be encouraged that even among the members of this committee, the music at each of our parish liturgies varies based on our own personal talents, talents of our musicians and priests, number of parishioners and number of other musicians, resources, time we are able to commit, etc. There is certainly space for variation across the diocese. We all know this first hand and want to help you discover what this might look like at your own parish.

We also know you may have further pastoral concerns regarding music in the liturgy that are not addressed in this short letter. We invite you to be in touch with any one of us. We would love the opportunity to encourage you and help shoulder the burdens you carry as the primary steward of the Liturgy.

In closing, we want to offer one final encouragement. Your reliance on the Holy Spirit in regards to the beauty of the Liturgy is the most important piece of advice we can offer. As He offers us gentle and patient guidance, so too can you offer that same guidance to your congregation and musicians. The Liturgy is the primary way for the people in your pews to meet Jesus. The way you interact with your musicians and offer change or correction is also a powerful way for them to meet Jesus. You have an opportunity to shepherd your flock with the love of the Good Shepherd. And again, thank you for giving you life as a priest. We are eternally grateful to each and every one of you.

The Liturgical Commission of the Diocese of Lincoln

Bishop James Conley

Fr. Chris Eckrich, Diocesan Master of Ceremonies

Fr. Evan Winter, St. John the Baptist, Minden

Sr. Mary Cecilia, C.K., Liturgical Commission Chair

Becca Deaver, All Saints, Holdrege

Amy Flamminio, Cathedral of the Risen Christ, Lincoln

Mary Odgaard, St. Peter, Lincoln

Terri Schilmoeller, St. Teresa's, Lincoln

Read more of the Church's Instructions:

[Website to access the GIRM](#)

[GIRM instructions PDF](#)

[USCCB Sing to the Lord](#)