



# DIOCESE OF LINCOLN

---

## CHANCERY

Dear Musicians,

With great love and respect, the Liturgical Commission of the Diocese of Lincoln would like to offer thoughts and guidance regarding music in the liturgy. First of all, we want to thank you for your gift of time and talent to Our Lord in Holy Mass. Music for the Liturgy is an important part of our prayer and worship as Catholics, and indeed, as human beings. We recognize that there is a great deal of selfless service in our parishes when people step forward to provide the music, and we are grateful for each of you and what you contribute to our parishes.

We acknowledge that we cannot know the particulars of every parish in our diocese, but between the members of this committee we do represent many musical backgrounds and experiences in a variety of churches and parts of the diocese. It is our great desire to help you, musicians, by offering practical ideas of how to help make the music the best it can be at your individual parishes. Our vision as a committee is to collaborate with you and your pastors to elevate our liturgies to the most beautiful they can be, in order to better glorify God and help sanctify the people of your parish.

The Sunday Mass is the primary occasion for worship in your parish. As a point of evangelization and right worship, 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.

The General Instruction of the Roman Missal (GIRM), the Church’s most up-to-date rules for how to celebrate the Mass, says:

“The Christian faithful who gather together as one to await the Lord’s coming are instructed by the Apostle Paul to sing together psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (cf. Col 3:16). Singing is the sign of the heart’s joy (cf. Acts 2:46). Thus St. Augustine says rightly, ‘Singing is for one who loves.’ There is also the ancient proverb: ‘One who sings well prays twice.’” (GIRM, par. 39)

Each parish has a unique set of circumstances, and implementation of the following will vary according to individual strengths and needs. We hope this will give us all a place to begin a dialogue regarding music in our parishes. To begin, we have chosen two areas of focus that we feel are important. These are understanding the sung degrees of the Mass, and the importance of choosing theologically and musically appropriate hymns.

## 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)

- 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)

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.

### *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). For those musicians in charge of weekday celebrations of the Mass (such as our school music teachers), we hope that understanding these instructions will be helpful to you as well since you are entrusted with the future of our church musicians. Implementing these sung degrees will vary from parish to parish; for example, you can encourage your priest to sing his parts (the first degree), but if he is not ready to do this, it is acceptable to continue to the subsequent degrees.

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

In addition to the shorter dialogues like "The Lord be with you/And with your spirit," the *Sanctus*, Mystery of Faith (Memorial Acclamation), and the Lord's Prayer are also included in this degree. While the first degree is the most important part of singing the Mass, we recognize that implementation of this degree is dependent on the willingness and capability of your priests to sing their parts in the dialogue.

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

If singing is to be added beyond the first degree, ideally these elements are the next in line to be sung. The Church stresses that when singing the Ordinary, the words should remain intact (avoiding repeating 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.

It is important for all people to participate in the Profession of Faith, and while the Creed is part of the ideal in the GIRM, it is not practical to sing it in our parishes at this time. Pastoral priorities in our Diocese will mean that each pastor and parish will determine what is best practice for their parish. Your pastor can help determine whether or not the various parts of the Ordinary are sung on Sundays and at other Masses.

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

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.

Musicians and pastors can work together to determine which options make the most sense for their parish. For congregations interested in implementing the antiphons in their liturgies, a good starting place is to chant the entrance antiphon after an opening hymn, or the communion antiphon before a communion hymn, using a simple psalm tone. If you desire free resources or additional information, you are invited to reach out to a member of our committee.

## **Selection of Hymns**

When selecting hymns, we suggest prayerfully reading 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 take care that the texts 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 Challenges and Opportunities Regarding Music**

As each parish is different, there may be variations in the levels to which parishes are able to implement the Church's musical ideals or the time frame in which this can be done. Even among the parishes of these committee members, the music varies based on our own personal talents, talents of our musicians and pastors, number of parishioners, resources, time we are able to commit, etc. When considering changes to your liturgical music, we invite you to take a long term approach. If you see an area for growth in your parish, making changes slowly and gently, in partnership with your pastor, will be the most effective way to ensure those adjustments are positively received by the congregation at your parish.

In closing, we want to offer one final exhortation. 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 we all work together with patience, recognizing that each of us brings our own talents and perspectives. The way you interact with your pastors and fellow musicians is a powerful way for them to meet Jesus. We are grateful to each and every one of you.

We know you may have further questions 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 you as you give so generously of your time and talent to the service of the Lord in His Sacred Liturgy.

### **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 Catholic Church, Holdrege

Amy Flamminio, Cathedral of the Risen Christ, Lincoln

Mary Odgaard, St. Peter Catholic Church, Lincoln

Terri Schilmoeller, St. Teresa Catholic Church, Lincoln

Read more of the Church's Instructions:

[Website to access the GIRM](#)

[GIRM instructions PDF](#)

[USCCB Sing to the Lord](#)