

# **Handbook for Cantors**

## **A THEOLOGY OF LAY LITURGICAL MINISTRY**

*"But you are a 'chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people of his own, so that you may announce the praises' of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pt. 2:9).*

All liturgical ministers are, first and foremost, members of the Body of Christ. Through their baptism they are the "holy people and royal priesthood" whose right and privilege it is to participate in the ministry of Christ. How the lay faithful exercise this ministry in the world varies, but the fullest and most fundamental expression of it has always been "conscious, active and fruitful participation in the mystery of the eucharist" (General Instruction Of The Roman Missal - GIRM, Introduction #5).

Since the celebration of the Eucharist is the "action of the whole Church" (GIRM, Introduction #5), everyone in the assembly has "an individual right and duty to contribute their participation" (GIRM #58). Some of the faithful are called to serve God's people in a more particular way through one of the many liturgical ministries that have flourished in the Church since the Second Vatican Council. This diversity of roles, functions and ministries enriches our celebrations and assists us in our prayer. Serving in one of these ministries is both an honor and a responsibility, and those who commit to it need nurturing and support. This handbook has been prepared to help you grow in a deeper understanding and love for the liturgy, your ministry and ultimately the Lord whom we all serve.

## **CANTOR**

The present Cantor Handbook is the first step in establishing an ideal and pastorally working toward the goal of prayerful music ministry. The Music Sub-commission of the Diocese of Columbus presents this aid to parish musicians as a tool for continuing growth. Its implementation should be undertaken with pastoral sensitivity.

## **MUSIC SERVES THE EXPRESSION OF FAITH**

Among the many signs and symbols used by the Church to celebrate its faith, music is of preeminent importance. As sacred song united to words it forms a necessary or integral part of the solemn liturgy. Yet the function of music is ministerial; it must serve and never dominate. Music should assist the assembled believers to express and share the gift of faith that is within them and to nourish and strengthen their interior commitment of faith. It should heighten the texts so that they may speak more fully and more effectively. The quality of joy and enthusiasm which adds to community worship cannot be gained in any other way. It imparts a sense of unity to the congregation and sets the appropriate tone for a particular celebration. (MCW 23)

## **THE ROLE OF THE CANTOR**

While there is no place in the liturgy for display of virtuosity for its own sake, artistry is valued, and an individual singer can effectively lead the assembly, attractively proclaiming the Word of God in the psalm sung between the readings, and take his or her part in the other responsorial singing. “Provision should be made for at least one or two properly trained singers, especially where there is no possibility of setting up even a small choir. The singer will present some simpler musical settings, with the people taking part, and can lead and support the faithful as far as is needed. The presence of such a singer is desirable even in churches which have a choir, for those celebrations in which the choir cannot take part but which may be fittingly performed with some solemnity and therefore with singing.” (MS 21) Although a cantor “cannot enhance the service of worship in the same way as a choir, a trained and competent cantor can perform an important ministry by leading the congregation in common song and in responsorial singing.” (BCLN, 18 April 1966) (MCW 35)

## **THE CANTOR'S PRESENCE**

The cantor's ministry is not always convenient and often requires sacrifice. The ministry is God-oriented and can never be used selfishly as a showcase for one's talents. In his 1999 Christ Mass homily, Bishop Griffin stated "Music is a form of prayer at Mass and should be directed to praising God. In some Christian traditions, music is primarily for inspiration, and is directed toward the feelings of the congregations. This is not the case with us. For us, the primary focus of the Mass is God, and music at Mass invites the community to become involved in responding to Christ's action in the Eucharistic celebration. Singing, playing the organ and other suitable instruments, or simply allowing good music to lift our hearts in prayer can do this. Each of these actions is active and conscious participation in the Mass.

The cantor must be aware of his or her postures, movements, and clothing. All these should reflect the prayerful nature of the ministry. Nothing should detract from the ministry by drawing undue attention to a particular minister. The role of the cantor should not be hindered by personal appearance or affected singing.

Just as the lectors, homilists, and Ministers of the Eucharist are prepared, so too should the cantors be well-versed in their ministry. Know the notes and understand the texts before leading the assembly. Sing confidently, but do not be oppressive. Establish regular eye contact and engage the assembly. The cantor should also understand the space in which he or she is singing. When gestures are deemed necessary, large spaces require larger gestures, while smaller spaces allow more subtlety. Be aware of the room's acoustic and the role of the organist or other musicians.

## **CANTOR'S USE OF THE MICROPHONE (WHERE ABSOLUTELY NECESSARY)**

One aspect of good musical leadership is knowing when to help the assembly, and when to allow them to sing on their own. The cantor cannot sing *for* the assembly. The cantor should assist in establishing a collective confidence within the assembly that will encourage full participation. A working knowledge of those parts belonging to the assembly and to the cantor or presider is essential. It is important that the cantor does not intrude into the dialogical nature of the Eucharistic Prayer, for example. As with all aspects of music ministry, pastoral decisions must be made by the most competent musical authority.

## **CANTOR SKILLS**

Cantors should be good singers. This involves taking care of the voice and seeking continuing development. Participation in diocesan cantor workshops, private voice lessons, or careful study with a competent musical authority are paths of growth for this ministry. Be vigilant about diction, good tonal production, and the expressive aspects of the music for Mass. Practice regularly. Seek more information about the theology of the ministry.

Understand the prayerful aspects of the ministry. Realize that the ministry does not allow for "on-the-job" training. Cantors should arrive with a determined set of skills. Mass is not the place to be refining performance technique.

## CONCLUSION

This handbook has been prepared by the Office of Liturgy to assist you who are called to liturgical ministry. It defines your responsibilities according to the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* (2nd.edition - 1975) the current directives of the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy.

Consultation and study of the *Institutio Generalis Romani 2000* is in progress. the actual text of the new Roman General Instruction cannot be changed, however, emendations can be made for its application in the United States. While the NCCB Committee on the Liturgy continues its work, Bishop Griffin has directed that no changes be made to current liturgical practice within our diocese (protocol #09/00).

We are committed to supporting you in this ministry and in your desire to grow in your understanding of the liturgy you serve. It is our hope that this handbook will be the beginning of a dialogue between liturgical ministers that encourages us to reflect upon why we do what we do and how to enter into "full, active, conscious" participation in the liturgy through the ministry to which we have been called.

If you have questions, comments, or ideas to add to the revision of this handbook, please direct them to:

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Peace and all good!

## **SUGGESTED READING**

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## **A MINISTER'S PRAYER**

(Adapted from an ancient Celtic prayer attributed to St. Patrick).

Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,  
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,  
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise,  
Christ in the heart of everyone who thinks of me,  
Christ in the eye that sees me,  
Christ in the ear that hears me.