

# Music Guidelines for Wedding Liturgies

The following guidelines have been developed by the Music Sub-commission of the Diocesan Liturgical Commission. They are set forth to help all ministers who work with the preparation and celebration of wedding liturgies in parishes of the Diocese of Columbus. These guidelines offer guidance and uniformity with regard to music, which is integral to all Catholic liturgies.

*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 an 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 speak more fully and more effectively. The quality of joy and enthusiasm which music 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. (Music in Catholic Worship #23)*

While the celebration of the marriage rite is an intensely personal event, it is more than a personal or private function. This ceremony takes place in the presence of a community of worshipers in the Catholic Church. The worshipers feel a natural desire to join in this event and to express their support, joy and faith through prayers, acclamations and songs. Music at any worship service is integral to the purpose of the rite. Consequently, music should be chosen to express and support this fundamental understanding of the ceremony of marriage. However personally meaningful some music may be to the couple, the principle that governs its sacredness and consequent acceptability is this religious aspect of the wedding as distinct from the social reception for family and friends.

The essential principle to be kept in mind is that music is a part of the liturgy. Thus, the compositions that are sung, the persons who sing them and the times they are sung are to be in accord with the liturgy that is being celebrated and with the general principles of the liturgy.

According to the statement by the U.S. Bishops' Committee on Liturgy, "Music in Catholic Worship", the following judgments are involved in selecting music:

1. **The musical judgment:** Is the composition good and artistically sound, whatever the style?
2. **The liturgical judgment:** Is the selection appropriate for the particular part of the liturgical celebration? Do the words speak of Christ, community worship, the mysteries of faith and love? Are the people enabled to fulfill their role in singing the parts especially pertaining to them? Is the music religious in its associations?

To help determine the appropriateness of any given piece of music, the following question should be asked: Does the music in question bring to mind associations of the theater, opera, movies, commercials, television shows, or other secular connections? If so, it is probably not a suitable choice for the liturgy, although it might be very appropriate at the rehearsal or reception.

3. **The pastoral judgment:** Will the piece of music help those in attendance to pray and express their spirit of joyous worship? If persons of other faiths will be attending, will the hymns selected include some in which all faiths are able to participate?

**Theological adequacy** must also be used in the selection of music. When judging musical texts for theological adequacy, one should be guided by the following wording from the proposed “Directory for Music and the Liturgy for Use in the Dioceses in the United States of America” (USCCB, 2006), which in part, states that *“Individual songs should be consonant with Catholic teaching and free from doctrinal error.”*

## **Guidelines for the Selection of Suitable Wedding Music**

The Church, in encouraging couples to take an active part in the preparation of their wedding liturgy, recognizes that the Sacrament of Matrimony is both a public testimonial and a personal commitment. Each marriage ceremony is a unique event in the lives of two people- indeed, in the lives of all present. The liturgy should reflect this uniqueness - it should be a reflection of all those present.

In planning for such a liturgy, the following statement from the Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy should be carefully considered:

*Great care should be taken, especially at marriages, that all the people are involved at the important moments of the celebration, that the same general principles of planning worship and judging music are employed as at other liturgies, and above all, that the liturgy is a prayer for all present, not a theatrical production. (Music In Catholic Worship. #82)*

In all liturgies, each person who takes part in the service must be considered. In a wedding ceremony, the following persons or groups of persons are present:

1. The bridal couple.
2. The official witnesses, wedding party, and/or immediate family.
3. Guests.
4. Ministers, servers, musicians, singers, *et al.*

There must be a harmonious blend of meaning for all these people as well as for the bridal couple itself. The bridal couple should consult with the above mentioned groups to insure a liturgy that is both expressive and appropriate.

An important criterion in selecting music is its ability to elicit a prayerful response for this particular community. When the sacrament of matrimony is celebrated within the Mass, the centrality of the Eucharist must be understood. In addition to the covenant love being celebrated, the unifying nature of the Eucharist should be emphasized. Everything else surrounding the ceremony should be supportive, including the music.

Since the Church urges the assembly's participation, it is important that all present take part in the singing of hymns, acclamations and other appropriate responses. The Second Vatican Council restored the cantor to lead the congregation in the singing of the responsorial psalm and the gospel acclamation. When soloists are used, they should be good musicians and assist in the development of a prayerful setting; they are not to be considered or give the impression that they are “entertainment.”

One should always remember that the organ and orchestral instruments have always been associated with the liturgy. *“While the organ is to be accorded pride of place, other wind, stringed, or percussion instruments may be used in liturgical services in the dioceses of the United States of America, according to longstanding local usage, provided they are truly apt for sacred use or can be rendered apt.”* (GIRM #393,2) In assisting the bridal couple in design the music program, it should be noted that different combinations of instruments can be used effectively. The availability of instrumentalists will often be the deciding factor.

The wedding ceremony celebrates the covenant relationship: the total gift of self to another. Human love of husband and wife is perhaps the most perfect sign of God's love for His people. Holy Scripture abounds with such references. In the Old Testament, two entire books speak of the sacramentality of human love: the Book of Hosea and the Song of Solomon (Canticle of Canticles). In the New Testament Jesus calls himself the Bridegroom (Jn 3:28-30; Mt 22:1-14; Mt 25:1-13). St. Paul compares the love of husband and wife to that of Jesus for His Church (Eph 5:22-33). Finally, in the Book of Revelation which speaks poetically of the Kingdom that is to come, the Church is the new Eve adorned for her spouse, the Lord (Rev 19:7-8; 21:1-2).

The following three principles are to be kept in mind in selecting suitable music for a wedding liturgy.

1. A song which speaks directly of the divine-religious dimension of love is most suitable for a wedding liturgy.
2. A song which does not speak directly of the divine-religious dimension of love, but implies it, may be suitable for a wedding liturgy.
3. A song which negates either explicitly or implicitly the divine/religious dimension of love is not suitable for a wedding liturgy.

There are many songs which speak of love in merely a physical sense or in the context of selfish pleasure. A particular meaningful song which may not be sung at the liturgy itself might better be used at the reception.

Music "should be considered a normal and ordinary part of [this] liturgical celebration" (LMT, #13). More often than not, the bridal couple needs guidance in the selection of music. It is imperative that this guidance be provided by a minister/musician competent in both music and liturgy. When couples have a good understanding of the elements of the marriage liturgy and the scriptures have been chosen carefully, music selection follows more easily. This guidance is best done in a personal manner; working with couples one-on-one or in small groups.

A musician has a serious responsibility, not only in guiding a couple toward fitting music, but also in making the ceremony a prayerful, memorable and meaningful one for all those involved. A couple, when consulting with musicians about wedding music, should bear in mind both the expertise and abilities of the musician with whom they consult. In this way, care will be taken in the planning of a wedding liturgy, insuring wholeness and harmony in all elements of the liturgical celebration.

The preparation of a wedding liturgy is at once a profoundly beautiful opportunity for Christian witness and catechesis, as well as a delicate task of balancing human sensitivities. It requires time and effort, sensitive prudence and cooperation.

# **Opportunities for Music in the Wedding Liturgy**

## **Prelude**

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy makes it clear that the members of the assembly are to dispose themselves to that which is about to be celebrated. Prelude music, therefore, should foster an atmosphere of prayer and reverential silence while members of the assembly are gathering and being seated. Several selections may be used; combining instrumental as well as appropriate vocal pieces.

## **Procession / Entrance Song**

Music for the entrance song should focus the assembly's attention on their role as active participants of the liturgy. The procession and entrance song should be appropriate. Whether instrumental or sung, the entrance song should be an appropriate hymn of praise or a hymn of petition, asking God's blessing on the couple to be married.

## **Responsorial Psalm**

The musical setting of any psalm is appropriate here, provided it is responsorial in style, i.e. the cantor sings the verses and the assembly responds with the sung refrain. Psalms 33, 34, 103, 112, 128, 145, and 148 are very appropriate for weddings. The psalm should be sung. Songs based on psalms which paraphrase the text of the psalm are not to be used in place of the Responsorial Psalm.

## **Gospel Acclamation**

The gospel acclamation should always be sung. An appropriate setting of the "Alleluia" or acclamation of praise during the season of Lent can be chosen.

## **Presentation/Preparation of the Gifts**

Because in the context of a wedding this ritual action does not take a long time, it is important that music not be so long as to interrupt the flow of the liturgy. Often solos will do just that and place undue importance on this part of the liturgy. Instrumental music is highly recommended for the preparation of the gifts.

## **Eucharistic Acclamations**

The Preface Acclamations, Memorial Acclamation and Concluding Doxology should be chosen from settings that are familiar to most practicing Catholics. As a matter of course, guests who make up the assembly often come from different parishes. Keeping in mind the active, full, and conscious participation of the assembly, the setting of these acclamations should be familiar and easy for the assembly to sing.

## **Communion Procession**

The music for the communion procession should be Eucharistic in nature, i.e., expressing praise and thanksgiving and stressing our oneness in Christ. Ideally, a short, simple refrain to be sung by the assembly with the verses sung by a cantor should be selected.

## **Concluding Procession**

The music at the Nuptial Procession is traditionally instrumental and joyful in nature. The style may vary from traditional to the avant-garde or from stately to dance-like. The operative words here are appropriate and dignified.

## **Liturgical Seasons**

Music selections should be in keeping with the liturgical seasons, but not be in opposition to the liturgical season.

## **Other Music Issues**

### **Recorded Music**

In keeping with the General Principles on the Structure of the Liturgy, Liturgical Music Today (1982) offers the following guidelines on "Recorded Music."

60. The liturgy is a complex use of signs expressed by living human beings. Music, being preeminent among those signs, ought to be "live". While recorded music, therefore, might be used to advantage outside the liturgy as an aid in the teaching of new music, it should, as a general norm, never be used within the liturgy to replace the congregation, the choir, the organist or other instrumentalists.

### **The Unity Candle**

The lighting of the unity candle to symbolize the uniting of two individuals or two families is not part of the Catholic wedding liturgy. Candles lit during the liturgy represent the light of Christ, not an individual or family. The use of candles to symbolize something other than Christ weakens the value of the symbol. The union of the couple is ritualized in the wedding liturgy by the exchange of consent, vows, rings, nuptial blessing, and (for two Catholics) within the context of a Mass, by the sharing of the Eucharist. It is advisable to light a secular candle "symbolizing unity" at the wedding reception.

### **Marian Devotion**

It is hopeful and encouraged that a couple has a spiritual devotion to the Blessed Mother as part of their married life together. The practice of bringing flowers to the Marian shrine, however, is not part of the Catholic wedding liturgy. This practice stems from different cultures and ethnic traditions and has grown "popular" in recent times.

Private devotions interrupt the flow of the Marriage Rite. It is like taking time out from the community's actions for a private moment for the bride or couple. Such devotions should be done privately at another time; possibly at the rehearsal.

### Copyright Permissions

Oftentimes when a couple is overwhelmed with the preparations for its wedding and desires to print a booklet or folder containing the texts and the hymns for the wedding service, the necessity of obtaining copyright clearance for the use of materials is overlooked.

After selecting the texts and the music, it is helpful to list the titles, the composers and authors, the title of the book in which these were found, and the name and address of the publisher or copyright owner. Occasionally, a publisher will have received permission to include a certain work in their collection; then the original copyright owner needs to be contacted. A borrower cannot grant the permission.

After all the data has been assembled, a letter requesting permission to use the copyright materials should be addressed to the Director of Copyrights and Permissions of the respective publisher or owner. This letter should contain the following information:

1. The purpose of the request.
2. The title of the composition, name of the composer/author, name of the hymnal or collection and date of copyright.
3. If texts only are to be used, the specific text to be used should be given together with the information in item 2.
4. The number of copies to be printed or copied.
5. The name of the person seeking the permission (both signature and in print) and full address.  
***Six to eight weeks should be allowed for response.***

Some companies do allow "one-time usage" permissions but these should not be presumed. It is the usual policy that the copyright owner be sent one or two copies of the prepared booklet.

All texts from the *Sacramentary* are owned by the International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc. (ICEL). Permission must be obtained to use them. It is important to understand the ICEL demands that "the sense-lines" as printed in the *Sacramentary* be observed. This means that if the *Sacramentary* has only one word on a given line, that word is to be alone on that line; if three words appear on a line, then those three words will be on that line.

Permission for the printing of approved Scripture readings should be obtained from the copyright owner (ICEL).

To assist in the process of obtaining proper copyright permission for the use of ICEL materials, there is a direct telephone line to the copyright permission desk of the Washington-based ICEL office: (202) 347-6640.

The following is a partial list of publishers:

GIA Publications, Inc. 7404 S. Mason Ave., Chicago, IL 60638-9927 1-800-442-1358

OCP Oregon Catholic Press, 5536 NE Hassalo, Portland, OR 97213-3638 1-800-548-8749

WLP World Library Publications, 3825 North Willow Road, Schiller Park IL 60176-2309 1-800-566-6150

Addresses not included above can usually be found on or inside the cover of the composition itself. The Diocesan Liturgical Commission can help locate a publisher's address if the need arises.

### **Note regarding resources found on the Internet**

While the Internet is readily available as a resource for a wide source of information, care must be taken to critically assess its admissibility within the Catholic liturgy. Persons preparing for wedding liturgies need to consider the authenticity of web sites before recommending them. Web sites that are not under the auspices of the Bishop are not approved for use or recommendation in the Diocese. Any such sites without an *Imprimatur* should not be considered for use in the Diocese.

## **Wedding Music Suggestions**

The following selections of music appropriate to Wedding liturgies are intended to be used as suggestions by helping couples and musicians choose from many selections of available music that are acceptable to Catholic wedding liturgies. This is not to be considered an exclusive list of music selections, but should be considered a guide in liturgical preparation for Weddings.

### **Prelude Music**

#### ***(Festive)***

Praeludium in E Major ..... *Vincent Lübeck*  
Prelude and Fugue in G Major (S.541) ..... *J. S. Bach*  
Prelude on "Simple Gifts" ..... *Wilbur Held*  
Voluntary in C Major ..... *John Stanley*

#### ***(Meditative)***

Meditation on "Brother James' Air" ..... *Harold Darke*  
Epithalamium (Wedding Song) ..... *Healey Willan*  
Slow Movements of Sonatas I, III, or IV ..... *Felix Mendelssohn*  
Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring ..... *J. S. Bach*

#### ***(Vocal Solos)***

The Call (Five Mystical Songs) ..... *Ralph Vaughan Williams*  
Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring ..... *J. S. Bach*

Witther Thou Goest ..... *Heinrich Schütz/Ludwig Lenel*  
 The Gift of Love (*O waly, waly*) ..... *arr. Hal Hopson*  
 Ave Maria ..... *Jacques Arcadelt, Bach/Gounod, Giulio Caccino, Flor Peeters, Franz Schubert*  
 Wherever You Go ..... *Weston Priory, David Haas*

### Procession

St. Anthony Chorale ..... *Franz Joseph Haydn/Johannes Brahms*  
 Voluntary in G Major ..... *John Stanley*  
 Trumpet Tune in D Major\* ..... *David Johnson*  
 Rigaudon\* ..... *André Campra*  
 Trumpet Voluntary\* ..... *Jeremiah Clarke*  
 Procession for Organ ..... *(Lobe den Herren) Martin Shaw*  
*(\*available in organ, solo or trumpet/organ arrangements)*

### Entrance Songs

All Creatures of Our God and King ..... *Lasst uns erfreuen*  
 Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee ..... *Hymn to Joy*  
 God of Love and Joy and Laughter ..... *Hymn to Joy*  
 Love Divine, All Loves Excelling ..... *Hyfrydol*  
 Hear Us Now, Our God and Father ..... *Hyfrydol*  
 May the Grace of Christ Our Savior ..... *Stuttgart*  
 Now Thank We All Our God ..... *Nun danket*  
 Praise to the Lord ..... *Lobe den Herrn*  
 O Father, All Creating ..... *Aurelia*  
 God in the Planning ..... *Slane*

### Responsorial Psalm

Ps.33, "The earth is full..." ..... *Joseph Gelineau*  
 Ps. 34, "Taste and see..." ..... *Michel Guimont*  
 Ps. 103, "The Lord is kind..." ..... *Michel Guimont*  
 Ps. 112, "Happy are those..." ..... *Joseph Gelineau*  
 Ps.145, "The Lord is compassionate..." ..... *Joseph Gelineau*  
 Ps.148, "Let all praise..." ..... *Joseph Gelineau*

### Gospel Acclamation

Alleluia ..... *Chant (Mode VI), Murray, or Melchior Vulpinus*  
 Celtic Alleluia ..... *Fintan O'Carroll/Christopher Walker*  
 Praise to You., (Lent) ..... *Randall de Bruyn or Marty Haugen*

### Preparation of the Gifts

See Organ Prelude (Meditative) or  
 Prelude Vocal Solos (except Ave Marias)

### Service Music

Community Mass .....	<i>Richard Proulx</i>
Mass of Creation .....	<i>Marty Haugen</i>
Sing Praise and Thanksgiving .....	<i>Michael Joncas</i>
People's Mass .....	<i>Jan Vermulst</i>
Mass of Light .....	<i>David Haas</i>
St. Louis Jesuit Mass	
Chant Mass	
Mass Settings familiar to the parish	

### Communion Procession

Gift of Finest Wheat .....	<i>Omer Westendorf</i>
I Received the Living God .....	<i>Anonymous</i>
One Communion of Love .....	<i>Marchionda</i>
Wisdom's Feast .....	<i>Omer Westendorf</i>
Taste and See .....	<i>Various Composers</i>

### Concluding Procession

The Rejoicing .....	<i>George Frederic Handel</i>
Trumpet Tune .....	<i>Henry Purcell</i>
Trumpet Tune .....	<i>David Johnson</i>
Toccatà from Symphonie No. 5 .....	<i>Charles-Marie Widor</i>
Allegro Maestoso from Watermusic .....	<i>G. F. Handel</i>
Ode to Joy .....	<i>Ludwig van Beethoven</i>
Prelude in Classic Style .....	<i>Gordon Young</i>
Toccatà in F .....	<i>Dietrich Buxtehude</i>
Rondeau .....	<i>Jean-Joseph Mouret</i>
Trumpet Voluntary .....	<i>John Stanley</i>
<i>Cwm Rhondda</i> .....	<i>Paul Manz</i>
Procesión Alegre (Joyous Procession) .....	<i>Garry Cornell</i>

## Helpful Reading for Liturgical Musicians

The Music Documents. USCCB, includes Music in Catholic Worship and Liturgical Music Today, Pastoral Press, Portland, OR 1-800-548-8749.

Handbook of Church Music for Weddings. Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, IL 1-800-933-1800.

Celebrating Marriage, Paul Covino, Pastoral Press, Portland, OR, 1-800-548-8749.

Parish Weddings. Austin Fleming, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago, IL, 1-800-933-1800.

To Join Together. Kenneth Stevenson, Pueblo Publishing Company, Collegeville MN.

A Blessing Not Lost: A Pastoral Letter on Marriage as the Foundation of Social Life, Bishop James A. Griffin, Diocese of Columbus.

Scripture at Weddings. Graziano and Nancy Marcheschi, Liturgy Training Publications, Chicago IL, 1-800-933-1800

Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship, Committee on Divine Worship, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2007.

## Notes