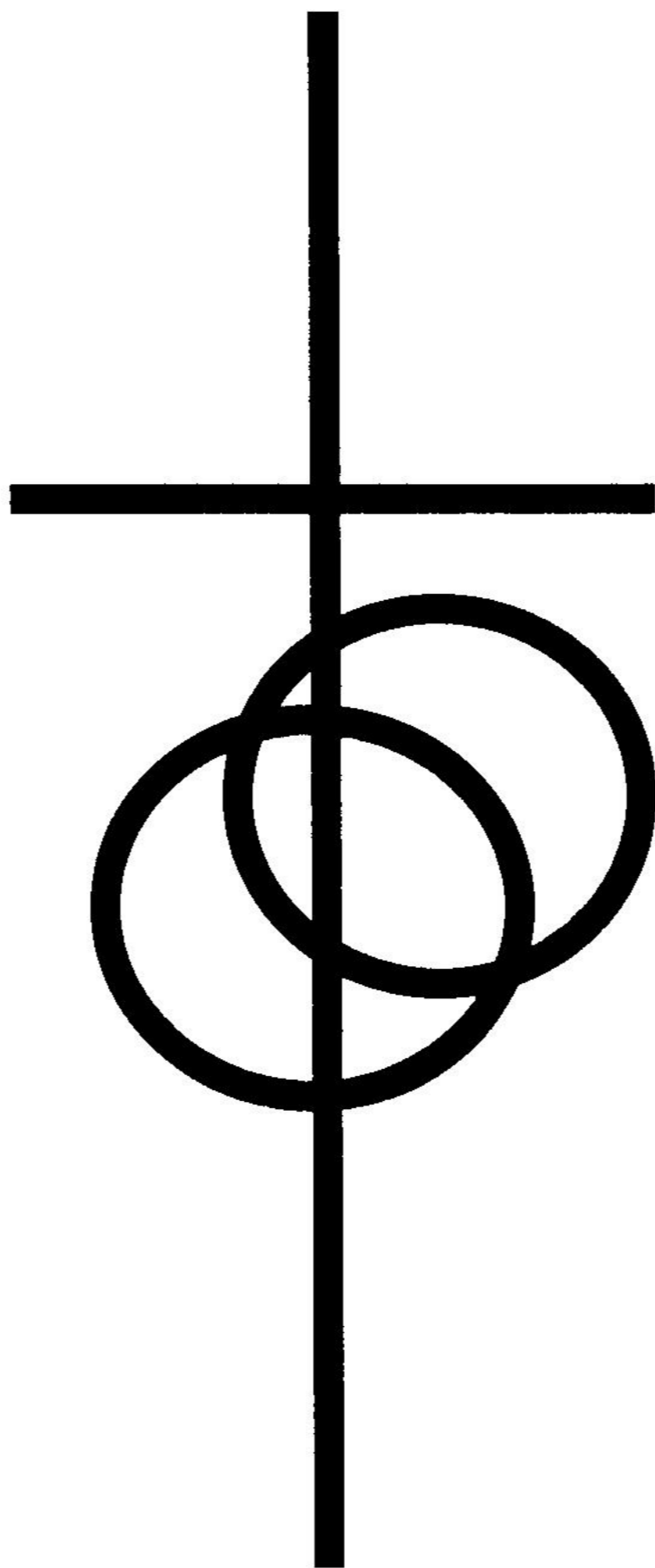


The Role of Music in the Marriage Rite



*The Office For Prayer and Worship
Archdiocesan Liturgical Musicians Association*

Archdiocese of Milwaukee

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Purpose of Guidelines

In order that the integrity of the rite of marriage and the proper role of music in the wedding liturgy be better understood, the following guidelines are presented to parish ministers who will assist in the Rite of Marriage. A parish should carefully choose which portions of this document will be given to a couple preparing for marriage. These guidelines may be used as the basis for parish guidelines and policies.

This document concentrates specifically on the role of music as being integral to the marriage liturgies. The first issue at hand is to understand marriage as a sacrament. A celebration of the sacrament of matrimony is designed not just for the bride and groom, family and friends, but for the entire Christian community in which the wedding takes place. Engaged couples are not merely planning their own prayer. The focus, instead, is seeking to help those in attendance to pray. Sacraments in our life are moments which we celebrate as church, not as individuals, couples, or classes.

Introduction

Marriage is a time of joy and celebration. "The quality of joy and enthusiasm which music adds to community worship cannot be gained in any other way." (Music in Catholic Worship #23)

Most people would agree that music can greatly enhance the celebration of marriage. In pastoral practice, however, tensions often arise when it comes down to who decides what selection is to be sung or played by whom and at what place in the liturgy. Sometimes those involved resort to lists of approved selections, and this has its merits. Often there is an attempt to enunciate principles, usually based on fundamentals of liturgical music in general or on how music is used at the Sunday eucharist. This approach also has merit.

There are some other questions to consider. There are different ways of looking at the matter. One might speak of "music at weddings" in a way that indicates that the music is an extra, added on to the wedding itself. Alternatively, phrases such as "musical celebrations of marriage": can be used to suggest that music is integral to the celebration of marriage; it is a substantial element and not an extra.

A liturgy of marriage consists of gathering, word, marriage, eucharist and going forth. It is not merely a eucharistic liturgy into which a rite of marriage has been inserted. The same principle would apply to the Rite for Celebrating Marriage outside Mass.

What music would be experienced at such a liturgy? The liturgical experience will be subjected to reflection and analysis to answer the further questions. What significance does this music have at the level of the couple and the worshipping assembly? What significance does this music have in terms of the relationship between God and God's people?

Music and Marriage

Music at weddings should invite those gathered to sing the prayer of the Christian community. Solo or instrumental pieces should draw those gathered to prayer and unity, rather than entertainment. A song which may have personal meaning for the bride and groom and which may express personal human love is only appropriate if it also expresses a Christian view of love and worship. Texts should clearly affirm a relationship with God. They should be in keeping with the belief of Catholic Christians, and be drawn primarily from scripture and from the liturgy. The desired end in all the music performed, vocal and instrumental, is an experience of communal prayer.

Music adds much to celebrations of the community especially when the community understands that the primary purpose of music is to aid their prayer. The singing of the assembly is to be preferred, even though a vocal soloist or choir may be very appropriate at certain times before and during the liturgy.

Music from the "Broadway review", the popular "hit parade" or even the liturgical "top 10", tends to dominate rather than serve the assembly's prayer.

It is helpful if a certain amount of the music (especially the acclamations) be familiar to the assembly so they can participate with ease. All factors regarding the make-up of the particular assembly need to be considered. A specially prepared participation aid can be helpful, especially if the hymnal or service book in the pews is inadequate.

The Documents

The Rite for Celebrating Marriage

On July 1, 1969 the rite for celebrating marriage was revised according to the decrees of the "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy," in order that this richer rite would more clearly signify the grace of the sacrament and that the responsibilities of the married couple would be better taught.

Music in Catholic Worship and Liturgical Music Today

In 1972 and 1982, the Bishop's Committee on the Liturgy respectively issued two documents: "Music in Catholic Worship" (MCW) and "Liturgical Music Today" (LMT).

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." (MCW #82).

Weddings present particular challenges and opportunities to planners. It is helpful for a diocese or a parish to have a definite (but flexible) policy regarding wedding music. This policy should be communicated early to couples as a normal part of their preparation in order to avoid last minute crises and misunderstandings. Both musician and pastor should make every effort to assist couples to understand and share in the planning of their marriage liturgy. Sometimes the only music familiar to the couple is a song heard at a friend's ceremony and one not necessarily suitable to the sacrament. The pastoral musician will make an effort to demonstrate a wider range of possibilities to the couple, particularly in the choice of music to be sung by the entire assembly present for the liturgy.

Particular decisions about choice and placement of wedding music should grow out of three judgments proposed in Music in Catholic Worship. The liturgical judgment: Is the music's text, form, placement and style congruent with the nature of the liturgy? The musical judgment: Is the music technically, aesthetically and expressively good, irrespective of musical idiom or style? The pastoral judgment: Will it help this assembly to pray? Such a process of dialogue may not be as easy to apply as an absolute list of permitted or prohibited music, but in the long run it will be more effective pastorally. (LMT #27-29)

The Three Judgments

The Committee on the Liturgy of the National Conference of Catholic Bishops has given us criteria to be used in choosing music for any celebration of liturgy:

- 1. The Musical Judgment.** Music used in liturgy must be technically correct and of good quality. That which is merely cheap, trite musical cliché should not even be considered. By consulting with the organist or musical director to plan music for a wedding, a couple will avoid many mistakes and possibly embarrassing situations; this person has probably been involved in many weddings and can be most helpful to the couple.
- 2. The Liturgical Judgment.** The sacrament of matrimony is a public act, a sacred sign, an encounter with Christ. The music at weddings should serve to emphasize the sacred event, not distract from it. It should assist all who are present to share the gift of faith and to join with the Church in prayer for the couple. For this reason, if one wishes to use songs at a wedding, one should be aware that, while they ought to be as musically attractive as possible, it is the text (the words) that should be considered most important: each text sung at a wedding ought to be readily identifiable as prayer, if it cannot, then it is out of place in a liturgical context. For this reason, it is recommended that popular or show-tune music is best left to the family reception, where another dimension of the celebration prevails.
- 3. The Pastoral Judgment.** Each wedding is unique, the music at a particular wedding must be judged on how well it will enable this particular group of people present at this particular wedding to express their faith. If it is meaningful for this type of experience, then it is appropriate. When choosing music, do not overlook religious songs of ethnic origin. These are very helpful in reflecting one's background and in involving one's friends, relatives, and family.

Since many or most couples have a limited awareness of appropriate sacred wedding music, a critical pastoral step is an early encounter between the parish musician and the engaged couple. At that time, they can have these basic principles explained and hear some of the perhaps less familiar, but beautiful, possibilities available for their wedding. Parishes that do not have a regular music director should designate someone to meet with couples preparing for their wedding. Even in the smallest of parishes, these three standards apply.

The Order of Service

Gathering

While the community of worshippers is assembling, appropriate music may be performed by instrumentalists, choir, or vocal soloists. The function of this preludial music is to gather up and unite the thoughts of all present and to prepare them for the celebration of the marriage. This music should also keep in mind the three standards used in choosing music for celebration of liturgy: musical, liturgical, pastoral. Therefore, it is not a time to perform a favorite song that cannot be used during the ceremony.

The goal of the entrance music is to open the celebration as a first act of worship, deepen the unity of the those gathered, introduce them to the mystery of the Season or feast, and accompany the procession.

If there is a procession to the altar, the ministers go first, followed by the priest, and then the bride and the bridegroom. According to local custom, they may be escorted by at least their parents and the two witnesses. Meanwhile, the entrance song is sung.
(#20 Rite of Marriage)

It is strongly recommended that a congregational hymn be sung during the procession in order to engage all those present in this act of gathering. Such singing makes the people participants rather than spectators. The selected song should express joy and be well known by all.

If the Gloria is used, it should be sung. Because of the music that has preceded, it might be advisable to omit the Gloria from the wedding service.

Word

There are two major musical moments during the Liturgy of the Word: the Psalm and the Gospel Acclamation. The psalm should be sung. The responsorial style is very appropriate. This allows for a cantor to alternate with the assembly which sings a simple refrain.

The Gospel Acclamation or Alleluia is also to be sung. If not sung it is to be omitted.

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Marriage

There is no designated place for music in the Rite of Marriage. To show community support, affirmation, praise and thanksgiving for what they have witnessed, a brief hymn or acclamation of assent may be sung by the whole community at the conclusion of the exchange of vows and rings. While this is suggested, it is not necessary.

It should be noted that the lighting of a candle is not part of the Rite of Marriage. If used, it should not be prolonged with sentimental or trite musical accompaniment.

Eucharist

Preparation Rite

The General Instruction on the Roman Missal describes the preparation of the altar and the presentation of the gifts (No. 49) as a practical rather than theological moment. Its importance lies in the shift of focus from the place of the Word to the place of thanksgiving over the bread and wine. This has some ramifications for the scale and style of music and procession.

The General Instruction states:

The procession can be accompanied by song. Yet song is not always necessary or desirable. Organ or instrumental music is also fitting at this time. The song need not speak of bread or wine or offering. The proper function is to accompany and celebrate the communal aspects of the procession. (# 50 GIRM and # 17-21 Order of Mass)

If a short choral or vocal work is done at this time it would most appropriately be one that focuses on the message of the readings.

Eucharistic Acclamations

The Eucharistic Prayer is the prayer of the entire assembly. The Eucharistic Acclamations (the Holy, Holy, the Memorial Acclamation, and the Great Amen) are to be sung in the familiar settings known by the community. The cantor or choir may lead the people in these sung acclamations.

These acclamations belong to all the people and, as such, should properly be prayed by them. (It should be noted that if the majority of the assembly do not attend Eucharist on a regular basis it would be best if the Rite of Marriage was celebrated outside of Mass. cf. Rite of Celebrating Marriage Outside Mass, Chapter II, The Rites).

Communion

The Lord's Prayer

As in any Eucharistic liturgy, the assembly may either recite or sing the Our Father. This is not an acceptable time for a vocal solo nor a musical setting that would be beyond the musical abilities of most of those gathered.

Breaking of Bread

The Breaking of Bread is accompanied by the litany, Lamb of God. The singing of the litany should last as long as the length of the breaking of bread and the pouring of wine.

This is not a time for "peace songs" or other "love songs". Please note that the Sign of Peace is not a musical moment in the Eucharistic Liturgy.

Communion Song

The Communion song accompanies the communion procession and expresses our unity in the Body and Blood of Christ, therefore, this song should speak of a wider community love. Congregational singing, by its very nature, reflects the meaning of Communion. Utmost care should be given to the song of Communion in order that it may express unity. This is not the time to sing a variety of all time favorites. It is recommended that one Communion song be done for the entire communion procession. Musical variations, vocally and instrumentally allow for the lengthening of most Communion songs. A refrain that is simple and not demanding may be sung by the assembly. Verses may be sung by cantor or choir and musically embellished.

Hymn of Praise

If unusual circumstances prevail and there is no Communion Song, a hymn of praise and thanksgiving may be sung after Communion by the congregation, choir, or soloist. Instrumental music is also appropriate at this time for creating a mood of silence, prayer, and reflection.

Going Forth

The dismissal is followed immediately by strong, joyous recessional music which may be a hymn sung by the assembly or choir, or an instrumental selection. This conclusion creates a bridge between the celebration of the marriage liturgy and the remaining events surrounding the liturgy. Music should be planned not with finality in mind, rather sending forth.

Selecting Music

Most couples seem to be more concerned with music that is special to the celebration of marriage, than with what is usually part of eucharistic celebrations in general. Often they will leave the choice of the "regular" liturgical music to the parish musician, or depend heavily on him/her for guidance regarding this.

If the couple participate regularly in good liturgical celebrations on Sunday, they probably will readily accept the value and necessity of the regular liturgical music - and its congregational character. If they have been away from Church practice for a while, or if their Sunday worship experiences are poor, education regarding this will have to be undertaken.

Some of the special wedding music that the couple may suggest will be suitable for celebrations that precede and follow the marriage liturgy. These opportunities for musical expression may be pointed out to the couple in a positive way (i.e., ethnic customs, Marian devotions).

There are only a few places where special wedding music - often vocal solos - fit into the liturgy of marriage; prelude music, preparation of the gifts, and communion meditation. As already indicated the "special wedding music" must also be judged by the three standards, musical, liturgical, pastoral.

Basic Criteria for Selecting Special Music for Weddings

Will the proposed music enable the couple and the assembly to worship God?

Does it express the faith of the couple and the Church, praise God for the gifts of life, tell of God's love, or ask for God's blessing on this marriage?

Do the words or music carry any double meanings, or are they excessively centered on the couple? (e.g., "Here Comes the Bride")

Can the sentiments expressed in the music be shared in by the assembly as a whole?

Is the music sufficiently beautiful as to be a worthy gift of this couple and to God?

Can the music be sung or played well by the persons involved?

The Musicians

The local church community or liturgical assembly, including couple and priest, is the primary musician in the liturgy of marriage.

The parish music director or organist is the primary musician who is to lead this ministry of music. Guest musicians should realize that they are to accompany and enable the singing and prayer of the assembly. Solos are not the guest musicians' only contribution to the wedding. The soloist should be helped to appreciate one's ministerial role and the place of one's contribution in the liturgy as a whole.

A leader of song or a cantor often facilitate the participation of guests who are not familiar with the parish's regular repertoire of liturgical music.

Substitutes

If the parish music director or organist is not available as the primary musician to lead the ministry of music at a wedding, a substitute must be chosen carefully. The substitute should know all the criteria set forth by the parish community. The same is true of any guest musicians who will be "assisting" at the marriage ceremony.

Since reimbursement for weddings is a part of the parish musician's livelihood, he or she should have the prerogative to be the musician for all weddings.

Just Compensation

Fees for weddings should be determined in consultation with the pastor and musician. It may be necessary to develop a parish policy which takes into account the economic situation of the couple and family. Just compensation for ministering the music at the church celebration should be in line with the other fees associated with the entire wedding.

It is the recommendation of ALMA (The Archdiocesan Liturgical Musician's Association) that the parish musician be reimbursed for each wedding at an agreed upon fee which is separate from his/her contracted salary. This recommendation stems from the fact that it is very difficult to determine the number of weddings that will occur in a given year when negotiating a contract.

Conclusion

It is important that we move from thinking about "music at the wedding" to "the musical celebration of marriage." It is important also that couples have good music experiences during other parish celebrations. These liturgies can serve as a fine teacher and will greatly facilitate the preparation for the Rite of Marriage.

The purpose of these guidelines is to aid parishes in developing sound principles as they determine policy in each of their respective situations.

These guidelines will hopefully not be seen as restrictions. Rather, they will be seen as a tool in improving the quality of our celebrations of the Rite of Marriage.

Acknowledgements

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