Selecting Music for Wedding Liturgies

The late spring and summer months are a popular time for the celebration of weddings in archdiocesan parishes. Clergy and parish staff who accompany future spouses during the period leading up to their weddings regularly receive questions concerning the music to be included at the marriage liturgy, whether within or outside of Mass. The following notes and observations are meant to be of assistance to engaged couples, priests, deacons, pre-Cana teams, parish music directors, and all who assist future husbands and wives in the preparation of wedding celebrations.

Liturgical Memos

June 5:
Pentecost Sunday

The extended Vigil of Pentecost may be celebrated on Saturday evening. The readings and psalms associated with the extended Vigil are given in the Lectionary for Mass Supplement.

The sequence Veni, Sancte Spiritus is obligatory only on Pentecost Sunday and not at the Vigil, unless, for pastoral reasons, the readings of Pentecost are proclaimed at the Vigil Mass. The extended dismissal consisting of “Alleluia, Alleluia” is said or sung at both the Vigil Mass and on Pentecost Sunday.

June 23:
Nativity of John the Baptist

Since the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart and the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist coincide in 2022, the Congregation (now Dicastery) for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments has determined that the Solemnity of the Sacred Heart will be observed on Friday, June 24, and the Nativity of Saint John the Baptist will be transferred to the preceding Thursday, June 23. In the Archdiocese, those parish communities whose church’s titular saint is Saint John the Baptist will celebrate their patronal solemnity on Thursday, June 23, in 2022.
General Principles

Engaged couples are called to prepare themselves for marriage, “by which a man and woman establish a lifelong partnership between themselves” (Order of Celebrating Matrimony [OCM], 1). This partnership begins when a couple, “as ministers of Christ’s grace, mutually confer upon each other the Sacrament of Matrimony by expressing their consent before the Church” (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1623). This sacred rite is the most significant part of the wedding festivities, as it is the consent given and witnessed in the liturgy that binds a man and woman to each other for the entirety of their lives, so that the two “become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).

In their sacramental union, a married couple becomes a sign of the love that exists between Christ and His Church. As such, the rite of marriage is truly a celebration of the entire Christian community. This is most perfectly expressed when family, friends, and relatives of the engaged couple actively participate in the wedding liturgy through song, word, and gesture.

The profound nature of the marriage rite demands that all aspects of this liturgy should be carefully planned. In particular, the music that is chosen should reflect the importance and holiness of the liturgical action by contributing to “the glory of God and the sanctification and edification of the faithful” (Pope Saint Pius X, Tra le sollecitudini, 1).

The music that is played and sung during the marriage rite should be appropriate for the sacred setting and clearly express the faith of the Church. As such, “the texts intended to be sung [at the liturgy]... should be drawn chiefly from Holy Scripture and from liturgical sources” (Sacrosanctum concilium, 121).

No matter what style of music is selected for the celebration of the Church’s wedding liturgy, it is "necessary... to emphasize that music destined for sacred rites must have holiness as its reference point” (Pope Saint John Paul II, Chirograph on the Centenary of Tra le sollecitudini, 4). That is, such music should be intimately linked to the liturgical action, promote the active participation of the faithful in the liturgy, and possess the qualities of prayer, dignity, and beauty.
Popular Music

Engaged couples sometimes wish to include secular songs or instrumental works within the wedding liturgy. Even when such works have special meaning to the couple, they are nevertheless inappropriate for use in liturgical celebrations when thoughtfully and carefully considered in light of the focus of the Church’s wedding liturgies on the sacramental nature of marriage.

This is not to say that secular musical works, whether they are secular in musical style or in language, do not have a place in the wedding festivities. To the contrary, many such songs are entirely appropriate at the wedding reception, at which other dimensions of marriage (e.g., romantic love or general, non-religious sentiments of optimism or inspiration) are celebrated. However, it is not appropriate to include these types of songs within the context of the wedding liturgy.

The minister who prepares the couple for marriage and the parish music director should give the necessary assistance to a couple in helping them to select music that will reflect the prayerful setting of the wedding liturgy. Very often, this will take the form of a pre-selected grouping of songs from which a couple may choose. Some parishes also make recordings of these songs available to the engaged couple. Sample lists of appropriate music for weddings may be obtained from the archdiocesan Office of Liturgy.

Pre-recorded Music

The bishops of the United States have indicated that pre-recorded music “lacks the authenticity provided by the living liturgical assembly gathered for the Sacred Liturgy” (USCCB, Sing to the Lord, 93). It is not pre-recorded music, but rather, the “lives of the faithful, their praise, sufferings, prayer, and work [which are to be] united with those of Christ and so acquire a new value” through the celebration of the liturgy (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1368). For this reason, pre-recorded music should not, as a general rule, be used within the Church’s marriage rites.

Musical Instruments

Instruments which are used to accompany the singing of the congregation or to provide instrumental accompaniment to liturgical actions should be suitable for sacred use. For the
Church, the pipe organ “is the traditional musical instrument” because it can “most effectively elevate people’s spirits to God and things above” (Sacrosanctum concilium, 120). However, other wind, string, or percussion instruments may be used, “provided they are truly suitable for sacred use or can be made suitable” (Ibid).

**Copyright/Licensing**

Prior copyright permission is required for the reproduction of music (both notation and text). If a bride and groom plan to prepare a worship aid or program, they should be reminded of the need to obtain permission to reproduce words and music. The parish music director should assist the couple in obtaining the necessary licensing.

**Special Considerations**

**Entrance Music**

The purpose of the entrance chant is to “open the celebration, foster the unity of those who have been gathered, introduce their thoughts to the mystery of the liturgical time or festivity, and accompany the procession of the priest,” other ministers, members of the wedding party, and the bride and groom (General Instruction of the Roman Missal [GIRM], 47). The first option given for sacred music at the entrance of the Mass is the antiphon from the Roman Missal or the antiphon and its psalm from the Roman Gradual. Other settings of the antiphon, other psalms or antiphons, or approved hymns may also be used during the entrance (GIRM, 48). If instrumental music is played during the entrance of a Nuptial Mass, then the antiphon in the Missal is recited or sung as the priest approaches the altar after greeting the couple (OCM, 50).

If the Rite of Marriage takes place outside Mass, an entrance song is sung (OCM, 81). When liturgically appropriate (i.e., outside of Lent), instrumental music may also be played before the entrance song when the Rite of Marriage is celebrated apart from the Mass.

**Gloria**

The Roman Missal indicates that the Gloria is a part of the Ritual Mass for the Celebration of Marriage, even in the Advent and Lenten seasons. As a hymn, the Gloria is most properly sung. The inclusion of this ritual text in the marriage rite can admittedly present pastoral challenges, particularly when either the text of the Gloria or the musical setting that is selected is unknown.
to some members of the congregation. In these cases, it may be helpful to include the full text and music of the *Gloria* in a program or worship aid. Keeping in mind that other aspects of the marriage rite may also be unfamiliar to those gathered (such as the acclamation following the reception of consent), participation aids can be of great assistance in promoting the active participation of the congregation at multiple points throughout the wedding liturgy.

In an effort to encourage congregational singing of the *Gloria*, some parishes have found it helpful to use either a *recto tono* setting with a modulating accompaniment or a setting in which a simple musical theme is repeated throughout the singing of the hymn. A refrain *Gloria* can also be used to promote participation, although the USCCB has noted that through-composed settings offer a clearer expression of the text as given in the *Roman Missal* (*Sing to the Lord*, 149).

**Responsorial Psalm**

Seven psalms with responses are provided in the *Order of Celebrating Matrimony* (*OCM*, 167-173). The purpose of the responsorial psalm is to foster meditation on the Word of God. It is preferred that the psalm be sung, rather than spoken, as the psalms were written as hymns for the Jewish people. The psalmist or cantor should sing the verses of the psalm from the ambo or another suitable place. “Songs or hymns may not be used in place of the Responsorial Psalm” as set forth in the liturgical books or via a translation approved for liturgical use (*GIRM*, 61).

**Hymns of Praise**

Following the blessing and giving of rings and the optional rite of the *arras*, a hymn or canticle of praise may be sung by the whole community. This song should capture the Gospel joy of the moment and thank God for the blessings bestowed on the newly married couple.

Similarly, after the reception of Holy Communion by the congregation, a psalm, canticle of praise, or other hymn may be sung to express the communion in Christ shared by the gathered community. This song should be sung by the entire congregation. A cantor may lead those gathered in singing this hymn, but this song should not take the form of a vocal solo, bearing in mind that it is meant to be an expression of ecclesial communion.

Other questions concerning music for the celebration of weddings may be directed to the Office of Liturgy or to members of the archdiocesan Liturgical Music Commission.
Liturgy Update

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Liturgical Q and A: Eucharistic Processions

On June 19, 2022, the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (Corpus Christi), the Church in the United States begins a three-year period of Eucharistic revitalization. This pastoral initiative is intended to foster belief and devotion in the Real Presence of Jesus in the Eucharist throughout the US and will culminate in a National Eucharistic Congress in Indianapolis on June 17-21, 2024.

As this time of Eucharistic revitalization begins, parishes are encouraged to organize Corpus Christi processions where this is possible. In many cases, local parishes have not held Eucharistic processions for many years, and the following notes may be of help to these communities as they make preparations for this ritual movement.

• The purpose of Eucharistic processions through the streets is to give public witness to the faith of the Christian people and to manifest their devotion to the Blessed Sacrament. Consequently, processions solely within the body of a church are no longer permitted, and processions with the Blessed Sacrament should usually go from one church to another. However, if necessary, a procession may return to the same church from where it began.

• The ritual book Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside Mass indicates that it is for the local Ordinary to decide on the advisability of such processions and to approve a place and plan that will ensure that these movements are carried out with decorum and reverence (101). In addition, suitable arrangements should be made with public authorities and law enforcement officials in order to provide for the safety of those who will participate in processions.

• Ideally, the Mass of the day will immediately precede a Eucharistic procession. Following the distribution of Holy Communion, a monstrance is prepared and placed on the altar. The Prayer after Communion is offered, the Blessed Sacrament is incensed, and the procession then begins. Eucharistic songs and hymns which are easily sung and memorized should be led by a choir during the procession. While not required, the traditional custom of stopping at stations in order to proclaim the Word of God and give a Eucharistic blessing may take place. A canopy or baldachin held over the Blessed Sacrament may also optionally be used. At the conclusion of the procession, benediction with the Blessed Sacrament should be given in the church where the procession ends. The Blessed Sacrament is then reposed.
• The Ceremonial of Bishops gives the following order for Eucharistic processions:
  • Cross-bearer with candle-bearers
  • Clergy in choir dress
  • Concelebrating clergy
  • Master of Ceremonies
  • Server - Thurifer 1 - Thurifer 2 - Server
  • Priest carrying the Blessed Sacrament accompanied by two deacons
  • Choir and Music Ministers
  • Members of the Faithful

**Liturgical Preparation Aid for the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ**

The Federation of Diocesan Liturgical Commissions (FDLC) has published a liturgy preparation aid for the Solemnity of the Most Holy Body and Blood of Christ (*Corpus Christi*). This preparation aid includes:

• Universal Prayer and Music Suggestions for Mass
• Guidelines for Eucharistic Processions
• Orders for the Exposition of the Blessed Sacrament, including Scripture and music suggestions during the period of exposition
• Vocabulary and Frequently Asked Questions

This resource may be downloaded from the Liturgy Office website and distributed freely.

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