

GUIDELINES
FOR THE USE OF
MUSIC
IN THE
CELEBRATION
OF THE
SACRAMENT
OF
MATRIMONY

Catholic Diocese of Baton Rouge

2003



DIOCESE OF BATON ROUGE
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September 2, 2003

Dear Friends Engaged to be Married,

“The grace and peace of Christ be with you.” (1 Thess 5:28.)

As your bishop, I extend heartiest congratulations and warm wishes as you prepare for the Sacrament of Marriage. During this accelerated time of your preparation, I rejoice with you and pledge my special prayers for you and your union.

It has well been said: “A wedding is for a day, a marriage for a lifetime.” Your wedding is the Church’s celebration of your call to married life. This brochure contains guidelines to assist you in the selection of music to enhance the spirit of faith and prayer during the marriage rite. Music is such an integral part of the wedding ceremony, assisting the words and actions done to express powerfully your own faith and appreciation for the spiritual dimensions of married life. You are expending considerable time, effort and energy in designing plans for your wedding. Careful attention to the choice of music (as well as the Scripture readings and liturgical prayers) can enormously enhance the celebration not only for the two of you, but for all who witness your marriage vows. This enables everyone to participate in a full, conscious, focused and spiritual manner.

I pray that God may dwell in your minds and hearts, with Jesus serving as the foundation of your new vowed life. The Sacrament of Marriage provides the source of grace upon which you can draw in your marriage to assist you in living the responsibilities of your hallowed state - to your respective families of origin and to the family you will together establish.

May Christ richly bless you as you welcome him as your invited guest and trusted companion. May God be with you as you move closer to your wedding day and bless you in your committed love in the years ahead.

An ally in Christ of your love for each other,

+ Robert W. Muench

Robert W. Muench
Bishop of Baton Rouge

YOUR MARRIAGE ... A HOLY REALITY

You have chosen to exchange your marriage vows within the context of a Catholic liturgical celebration of Matrimony. In doing so, you are expressing your belief that, as Christians, you see in the union of husband and wife the presence of God with His people. You believe, as the Church prays, that the love of man and woman is a mirror of God's everlasting love, and that the union of the believing husband and wife is so holy a mystery that it symbolizes the marriage of Christ and His Church. Between baptized persons, the state of marriage is a Sacrament.

A Catholic marriage is spiritual, even sacramental, not just legal; sacred, rather than merely secular; public, as well as personal. The couple signifies and shares in the mystery of that unity and love which exists between Christ and His Church. So it is indeed a happy occasion to celebrate. However, this celebration is not only for the bride and groom, family and friends, but also for the *whole Christian community* in which the marriage takes place.

YOUR WEDDING ... A COMMUNITY CELEBRATION

The custom of inviting friends and relatives to join the bride and groom in the celebration of their marriage give us an idea of the communal nature of marriage. When you realize that you are planning the **community's celebration** of your love for one another, a love that is to be a sacrament, a sign of God's faithful love in this community forever, you are a step ahead of those couples who are planning *their own* prayer or a big step ahead of those couples who are simply planning *their own show*.

Because the marriage ceremony is a public act of worship, it should reflect the communal nature of the sacrament, with the guests serving not merely as spectators, but rather as participants in the marriage celebration. They are called upon to pray, to sing, and to witness the love of Christ in the Church and in society, to be signs of Christian love and support for the couple as they begin their married life.

It is therefore of utmost importance when you are planning this significant event in your lives [and in the life of the Christian community of which you are a part], that the focus of the preparation be to help those in attendance to pray.

MAKE YOUR WEDDING "YOUR OWN"

The community idea does not mean that you will be unable to make the celebration "your own." In addition to choosing the members of your wedding party, you are encouraged to personalize the ceremony when you choose the readings, prepare the Prayers of the Faithful, as well as choose the people who will participate in the celebration itself.

You will spend countless hours preparing for your wedding: everything from the pre-wedding parties to the color of the flowers and the wardrobe for the day. Much creativity and care will be taken to make sure that everything will add to the beauty of this special day. Strangely enough, these important elements of creativity and care are sometimes applied to everything except the vitally important element of the *wedding music*.

PLANNING THE MUSIC FOR YOUR WEDDING

Music will add much joy to the occasion of your wedding. Its primary purpose will be to *help the people to pray*. Congregational singing, therefore, is to be preferred, even though a vocal soloist or choir may be very appropriate at certain times before and during the liturgy. Using the parish organist, cantor(s) and even choir is usually the best choice to insure that things go smoothly, for experienced pastoral musicians are used to enhancing times of prayer by their service.

Here are some guidelines to help you plan the music for your wedding mass in such a way that it will not only recognize the presence of the community of faith, gathered to pray with and for you, but will also help them to pray.

INTRODUCTORY MUSIC

While the guests are assembling, instrumentalists, choir or vocal soloists may perform appropriate music. The purpose of this prelude music is to gather up and unite the thoughts of all present and to prepare them for the celebration of the marriage.

The purpose of the entrance music is to escort the liturgical ministers and the wedding party with honor to the sanctuary, and to gather the congregation into a worshipping community.

A congregational hymn may be sung during the procession, or after the procession is completed and the presiding celebrant has welcomed all and invited them to stand and sing together. This hymn makes the people participants rather than spectators. The selected hymn should express joy and be well known by the congregation.

THE LITURGY OF THE WORD

The Responsorial Psalm should be sung by the cantor, alternating with the assembly, which sings a simple response.

The Gospel Acclamation or Alleluia is also to be sung by a cantor and the assembly.

After the exchange of vows, a brief song which focuses on God's presence to individual love may be used, but is optional.

THE LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST

When the Liturgy of the Eucharist is celebrated, it is recommended that instrumental music accompany the preparation of the gifts of bread and wine (sometimes called "the offertory"). This rite is a brief part of the liturgy and should not be over-emphasized. A *short* choral or vocal solo may be used which brings out the message of the readings.

The Eucharistic Acclamations [the Holy, Holy, the Memorial Acclamation, and the Great Amen] are to be sung in familiar musical settings known by the community. The cantor or choir may lead the people in these sung acclamations.

If using musical settings would keep the majority of people from participating in the acclamations, it would be better not to sing them but to recite them together, as these acclamations, as well as the Lord's Prayer and the Lamb of God which follows it, belong to all of the people and, as such, *should properly be prayed by them*.

The Song of Communion accompanies the communion procession and expresses our unity in the Body of Christ; therefore, this song should speak of a wider community love than do those sung during the wedding ceremony itself. Congregational singing, by its very nature, reflects the meaning of communion.

The assembly, choir or soloist may sing a hymn of praise and thanksgiving after Communion. Instrumental music is also appropriate at this time for lending a mood of silence, prayer and reflection.

CONCLUDING RITE

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.

THE THREE STANDARDS

The *Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy* of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops stresses three standards to be used in choosing music for any celebration of liturgy:

1. THE MUSICAL STANDARD: 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. When you consult with the organist or musical director to plan the music for your wedding, you will avoid many mistakes and possibly embarrassing situations; this person has probably been

involve in hundreds of weddings and can be most helpful to you. This consultation should be done well in advance of the wedding.

2. **THE LITURGICAL STANDARD:** 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. Music 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 you wish to use **songs** at your wedding, you should be aware that, while they ought to be as musically attractive as possible, it is the **text** [the words] which should be considered most important: each text sung at your wedding ought to be readily identifiable as **prayer**. If it cannot, then it is out of place in a liturgical context. While it is clearly possible that musical selections designed for purposes other than liturgical worship (such as popular show tunes, love songs and secular ballads) may also express some dimension of Christian faith and may, in some cases, help people pray, the practical fact remains that, in the vast majority of cases, compositions which are the most successful in fulfilling the purpose for which they were created will usually be only minimally successful when they are re-directed toward a much different end. For this reason, it is recommended that music of this type is best left to the family reception, where another dimension of the celebration prevails.

3. **THE PASTORAL STANDARD:** 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 hymns, do not overlook religious songs of ethnic origin. These are very helpful in reflecting your background and in involving your friends, relatives and family.

CONCLUSION

We trust that these guidelines will prove helpful to you in planning the music for this, the most important event of your lives. **If you have other concerns or questions regarding the music for your wedding, we advise you to check with your pastor or his delegate;** some parishes require adherence to an additional set of parochial guidelines for wedding music in hopes that the suggestions contained there will offer even more help to you in planning the celebration of your marriage.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

1. *“Directives for the Liturgical Celebration of Marriage,”* Liturgical Commission of the Archdiocese of Louisville, 1200 South Shelby Street, Louisville, KY 40203-1200
2. *“Guidelines for Wedding Music,”* The Diocesan Music Commission, 3888 Paducah Drive, San Diego, CA 92117-5349
3. *“Handbook of Church Music for Weddings,”* Office for Divine Worship, Archdiocese of Chicago, 1800 North Hermitage Avenue, Chicago, IL 60622-1101
4. *“Liturgical Music Today,”* Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 3211 Fourth Street NE, Washington, DC 20017-1194 (1983)
5. *“Music in Catholic Worship,”* Bishops’ Committee on the Liturgy, National Conference of Catholic Bishops, 3211 Fourth Street NE, Washington, DC 20017-1194 (1983)
6. *“The Ministry of Music, A Guide for the Practicing Church Musician,”* by William Bauman, The Liturgical Conference, P.O. Box 31, Evanston, IL 60204-0031

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