

Ministry Formation – Music Ministry

The assembly is the primary minister of music. The role of all other instrumentalists and singers is to support the primary role of the assembly and assist the faithful in singing praise to God. This requires a great deal of formation for the assembly over many years. Be patient. Don't give up and fall into the bad habit of thinking, "We can sing whatever we want because they won't sing anyway."

The choir's primary role is to support the singing of the assembly; its secondary role, is to bring music that is beyond the capability of the assembly to enhance the liturgy with beauty and offer yet another perspective on the readings and celebration of the day. Choirs assist the assembly by learning their harmonies and descants but "putting them in their pocket" until the assembly knows and sings its own "part" well. Rather than simply listening, through the help of a well-formed choir ministry, the assembly sings the acclamations, psalms, responses, etc. as a united community.

The cantor sings the psalm and the Scripture verse of the Gospel Acclamation and animates the response of the assembly. When necessary, the cantor may also serve as a song leader. Occasionally, the choir might sing the psalm together. However, this masks the intended dialogue between cantor and people with the choir supporting the people. (See Ministry Formation for the Cantor.)

A song leader may substitute for the role of the choir when a choir is not available taking on the role of supporting the song of the assembly. Liturgical documents encourage the full expression of ministry gifts in the liturgy. So, using a cantor to cover the role of song leader and choir is not ideal. Worse still if the accompanist assumes the roles of cantor and choir.

The music director/coordinator prepares music for the liturgy that supports the readings and the celebration of the day. While a director may plan for the entire parish, a coordinator may be responsible for a single liturgy. Consultation with a liturgy committee and pastor about overall directions for the parish is essential for the liturgy to be most effective in reaching the assembly. See Formation of a Liturgy Committee.

Repertoire that is, the music known and sung by the parish should reflect a broad perspective on the themes of the Paschal Mystery. Hymns, songs, chant, praise and worship styles may have a particular place in worship provided they meet the requirements of each part of Mass. For instance, a hymn is not appropriate at the communion procession because it requires the assembly to carry a book while they walk. A psalm or song with a refrain is best here. Praise and worship style music might be best as a prelude or at the preparation of the gifts depending on the text and how it supports a particular part of the Mass. See *Sing to the Lord* for details. Parishes should encourage a breadth of styles to engage a variety of people rather than using only one style for a Mass or a parish.

Personal music tastes must be tempered in favor of music that engages a whole assembly and serves well each part of Mass. See the U.S. Bishops' document called *Sing to the Lord* for an authoritative guide on music in the liturgy in the U.S.

The Ministry of Music, Kathleen Harmon, 2016, Liturgical Press, LitPress.org.