

# GUIDELINES FOR WEDDING MUSIC

**Diocese  
of  
San Diego**

## INTRODUCTION

### TO THE BRIDE AND GROOM

Congratulations! You stand on the brink of a sacred, exciting, lifelong adventure together. We know that this is a very happy and busy time for you and we share your hope that everything about your wedding day will be beautiful and joyous. These Guidelines for Wedding Music were created for this very reason.

When we think of weddings, we automatically think of the bride and the groom and their love for one another. There is much more involved in your love and your marriage, however, than just the two of you. There are your family and friends who have helped bring you to this point and who will continue to support and encourage you as you begin your new life together. And, most importantly, there is God who is the source of your love and whose love for you is reflected in your love for one another. That is why your decision to share your lives, and to grow together in Christian love calls for a special celebration in and with the faith community, the parish.

*People in love make signs of love, not only to express their love but also to deepen it. Love never expressed dies, Christians' love for Christ and for each other, Christians' faith in Christ and in each other, must be expressed in the signs and symbols of celebration or it will die. Music in Catholic Worship, #4*

**Everything** about the wedding ceremony should witness to all those present your understanding that you are entering a **sacred and holy union - a sacrament**. Therefore, everything about the service, including the music, calls for careful planning that will contribute to this understanding. If it does not, then it is unsuitable for your wedding celebration because it is unworthy of the occasion. Everyone present at your wedding should be led by the dignity and beauty of the liturgy to a deeper understanding of Christian marriage and, consequently, to a greater commitment to it. In a sense, your wedding is your gift to your family and friends. It is your invitation for them to enter into and

share your faith - your love, your prayer. We know that you are anxious to make it the best possible gift.

*Faith grows when it is well expressed in celebration. Good celebrations foster and nourish faith. Poor celebrations weaken and destroy faith. Music in Catholic Worship, #6*

Because you have chosen to invite Christ to make your love a sacrament, the music you choose for your wedding must express this unique and distinct encounter. Just as you would not expect to pronounce your wedding vows in street language, so you would not expect to hear "everyday" love songs within a ceremony celebrating sacramental married love. Certainly "your song" will have a place later in the day's festivities; but during the wedding liturgy itself the emphasis should be God's love for you, your love for God, the love of the community for you, your love for them and how these support and confirm your love for each other.

Music in Catholic Worship states that *to determine the value of a given musical element in a liturgical celebration a threefold judgment must be made: musical, liturgical and pastoral.* (#25)

## MUSICAL JUDGMENT

*Is the music technically, aesthetically and expressively good? This judgment is basic and primary and should be made by competent musicians. Only artistically sound music will be effective in the long run. To admit the cheap, the trite, the musical cliché often found in popular songs on the grounds of instant liturgy is to cheapen the liturgy, to expose it to ridicule, and to invite failure.* (Ibid. #26)

## LITURGICAL JUDGMENT

*The nature of the liturgy itself will help to determine what kind of music is called for, what parts are to be preferred for singing and who is to sing them.* (Ibid. #30)

The lyrics of songs chosen for the wedding liturgy should express the Christian concept of life, rather than one which is purely secular. The liturgy of marriage celebrates not only the human love between two persons but also their relation to God who is love. The texts *must always be in conformity with Catholic doctrine, indeed they should be drawn chiefly from Holy Scripture, and from liturgical sources. Constitution on Sacred Liturgy, Vatican Council II, #121*

Perhaps the best criterion is simply the question, "Can you pray the words of the text?" Does the music express and interpret the text correctly and manifest the meaning more clearly? Is the form of the text respected? In making these judgments the general classification of liturgical texts

must be kept in mind: proclamations, acclamations, psalms, antiphons, litanies, hymns, and prayers. Each has a specific function and form which must be served by the music chosen for the text.

*Special musical concern must be given to the roles of the congregation, the cantor, the choir and the instrumentalist. Music in Catholic Worship, #33 Music chosen should be within the performance ability of all involved. The choices of sung parts, the balance between them, and the style of musical setting used should reflect the relative importance of the parts of the Mass (or other service) and the nature of each part. (Ibid. #31)*

### **PASTORAL JUDGMENT**

*The pastoral judgment governs the use and function of every element of celebration. Ideally this judgment is made by the planning team or committee. It is the judgment that must be made in this particular situation, in these concrete circumstances. Does music in the celebration enable these people to express their faith, in this place, in this age, in this culture? (Ibid. #39)*

The music chosen should be effective for this congregation. It should be suitable for use in a religious, liturgical service whose primary concern is the worship of God. Therefore, the role of music in the celebration of the Eucharist and the sacraments is threefold:

1. Music must fulfill a role of service.
2. Music must invite and involve congregational participation.
3. Music must be an integral part of the liturgy.

Liturgical Music Today, #60, states that *liturgy is a complexus of signs expressed by living human beings. Music, being preeminent among those signs, ought to be "live."*

Consequently, recorded music (i.e. tapes, CDs) should not be used within the liturgy, particularly if it would replace the congregation, the choir, the organist, or other instrumentalists. Music in the liturgy is far more than 'atmosphere,' and our prayer and praise of God during the liturgy are expressions that are not pre-recorded.

Because of the communal aspects of the celebration, the role of the soloist has evolved into that of cantor or leader of song, thus encouraging the congregation in its rightful role of active participation rather than observation, while still providing some solo vocal pieces when that is appropriate and desired.

A worship aid/program helps the congregation fulfill their role of active participation in the liturgy. All music that the congregation is expected to sing

should be printed in the program or have hymnal/music book reference numbers listed to facilitate their full participation and make the liturgy truly alive.

### **PLACE OF MUSIC WITHIN THE WEDDING LITURGY**

Music suggestions are merely indicative of the various types of music and texts which may be used at the Wedding Liturgy. It is necessary to consult with your parish music director well in advance of the liturgy to coordinate the planning of this important day.

### **PRELUDE**

The arrival of your wedding guests may be accompanied by instrumental music, a vocal solo, or choir. The music selected should be in keeping with the event to follow, i.e., a period of prayerful preparation. It is not the time for performing a 'favorite piece' that is unsuitable within the ceremony itself.

### **INTRODUCTORY RITES**

#### **PROCESSIONAL**

The procession is a liturgical action described in the *Rite of Marriage*, as the ritual entrance of the ministers for the liturgy. The couple, as ministers of the sacrament of marriage, is included in the procession. This also reflects the Church's understanding that the bride and groom are complementary in marriage. The actual order of the procession may be planned with the presiding priest or deacon, led by an altar server or crossbearer and a reader carrying the *Book of the Gospels*, but equal attention should be given to both families. The procession and the music accompanying it should reflect the joyous dignity of the moment. Many appropriate selections were originally composed for royal or state, as well as religious occasions. On Sunday, the opening hymn acts as the "processional music", and an opening hymn can accompany a wedding procession as well. Generally, however, wedding processions are accompanied by instrumental music (organ, brass, strings, etc.) or vocal music (solo or group).

The so-called "traditional wedding marches" by Wagner and Mendelssohn are not to be used. Both are "theater" pieces which have nothing to do with the Sacred Liturgy. The "Bridal Chorus" from Wagner's opera, Lohengrin, actually accompanies the couple to the *bedroom*, not the altar! Mendelssohn's incidental music to Shakespeare's Midsummer Night's Dream accompanies a farcical wedding (the play is a *comedy*). More importantly, they have been used to accompany "weddings" in countless movies, TV shows and game shows. The majority of images these pieces conjure in the minds of the congregation may have a lot to do with

sentimentality but very little to do with worship. Because of this, even though they are frequently used in the United States in Protestant churches or non-religious wedding settings, they are rarely used in Catholic churches. Your parish music director should be able to suggest and demonstrate numerous other compositions from which to choose, thus adding to the dignity and uniqueness of your wedding liturgy. Some of the more popular selections include:

*Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring* - J. S. Bach  
*Canon in D Major* - J. Pachelbel  
*Trumpet Tune* - Purcell/Clarke  
*Trumpet Voluntary* - J. Clarke  
(also known as *The Prince of Denmark's March*)  
*Trumpet Voluntary* - Stanley  
*Overture from Royal Fireworks Suite* -  
G.F. Handel  
*Rondeau from Premier Suite* -  
J.J. Mouret

#### OPENING HYMN

The processional may also be a congregational hymn setting or may be followed by one. It should be one that is familiar in many denominations since there will probably be non-Catholics in attendance. The following are a few excellent choices:

*Love Divine, All Love's Excelling*  
*Joyful, Joyful We Adore You*  
*May the Grace of Christ*

#### PENITENTIAL RITE

The penitential rite is kept very simple in keeping with the nature of the wedding liturgy. It can be spoken or sung. If sung, a simple setting that has a short refrain for the congregation to repeat after the cantor would be best.

#### GLORIA

The Gloria is normally omitted unless the wedding within Mass takes place on a Sunday outside of Advent or Lent. The opening prayer concludes the Introductory Rites.

#### **LITURGY OF THE WORD**

1<sup>ST</sup> READING - Recited

#### RESPONSORIAL PSALM

A brief period of reflective silence follows the first reading, then the responsorial psalm is SUNG. The congregation sings the antiphon with the cantor singing the verses.

Psalms 33, 34, 103, 112, 128, 145 and 148 are recommended in the Roman Ritual. Your parish hymnal(s) will have settings of these from which you can choose.

#### GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

The Gospel Acclamation (or Alleluia) must be sung. If it is not sung, it is omitted.

The most commonly used settings of this include the plainsong chant and the *Celtic Alleluia*. There are many other Alleluias and Acclamations that would work, especially if the music is printed in your worship aid.

#### **RITE OF MARRIAGE**

The actual Rite of Marriage does not call for any specific music, but a short acclamation of praise such as an alleluia refrain can be sung by the congregation after the exchange of vows and again after the exchange of rings.

#### **LITURGY OF THE EUCHARIST**

#### PREPARATION OF THE GIFTS

An instrumental or vocal selection or a congregational hymn may accompany the presentation and preparation of the gifts. The music used here should not prolong this (minor) part of the liturgy. If a congregational hymn is chosen, it should follow the same criteria stated for the processional hymn. If a vocal solo is done it should reflect God's love for you and his blessing on your marriage. A few ideas are:

Classical:

*Wedding Song* - Peeters or Schütz  
*Be Thou With Them* - J.S. Bach

Contemporary:

*The Gift of Love* - Hopson  
*When Love Is Found* - Wren  
*A Nuptial Blessing* - Joncas or Proulx

#### EUCHARISTIC ACCLAMATIONS

In the eucharistic celebration the acclamations which ought to be sung are: Holy, Memorial Acclamation and Great Amen. These acclamations should be led by the cantor and sung in familiar musical settings in order to maximize congregational participation. Some of the most well-known Eucharistic Prayer acclamations include:

*Mass of Creation* - Haugen  
*Mass of Light* - Haas  
*Community Mass* - Proulx  
*Heritage Mass* - Alstott

**COMMUNION RITE**

LORD'S PRAYER

The Lord's Prayer is the congregation's common prayer, and the people should be able to participate. Generally it is spoken, but may be sung if the majority will be familiar with the setting. A solo version is not appropriate.

LAMB OF GOD

The Lamb of God is a litany which accompanies the breaking of the bread. It is preferable to do a Lamb of God setting from the same Mass setting as the Eucharistic Prayer Acclamations when that is possible.

COMMUNION SONG

Congregational singing is appropriate here because it gives expression to our unity in the Body of Christ. Preferably a song with repeated refrain for the congregation should be sung. A suitable vocal or instrumental solo or a choral piece could also be used here. Some ideas for a congregational song are:

*Gift of Finest Wheat*  
*I Am the Bread of Life*  
*Gather Us Together*  
*Ubi Caritas* - Taize or chant  
*Eat this Bread*  
*Taste and See* - Haugen, Kreutz or  
Moore

**CONCLUDING RITE**

RECESSIONAL

A festive instrumental piece of music is most effective as accompaniment to the recessional.

DEVOTION TO MARY

Where the custom exists of placing flowers at the shrine of Our Lady, a Marian song, or an instrumental piece is appropriate. It should take place after the Prayer after Communion before the Dismissal.

**RECOMMENDED RESOURCES**

All resources are available for use from the Liturgy Library at the Office for Liturgy & Spirituality, (858) 490-8290.

CELEBRATING MARRIAGE

Paul Covino, ed.; The Pastoral Press

GIFT & PROMISE - bilingual

Instituto de Liturgia Hispana, Oregon  
Catholic Press

HANDBOOK OF CHURCH MUSIC FOR  
WEDDINGS, Mary A. Simcoe, ed.  
Liturgy Training Publications

PREPARING THE WEDDING SERVICE - Novallis  
(**video**), Kenneth Hendrick; Liturgical Press

PARISH WEDDINGS

Austin Fleming; Liturgical Training Publ.

TOGETHER FOR LIFE

Joseph Champlin; Ave Maria Press

WHEN LOVE IS FOUND

Jeanne Cotter & David Haas; GIA

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