Guidelines for Music in the Celebration of Marriage

A Resource for Couples and Musicians



Divine Mercy
Parish

The Role of Music

Music is an essential component of the liturgy and, in the celebration of Matrimony, serves in a particular way to highlight the festive and solemn character of the rite. Since music is not merely a decorative element or a matter of personal preference, our Parish has deemed it appropriate to provide these guidelines so that the music selected may authentically reflect the dignity and holiness of the Sacrament.

These guidelines are grounded in the Church's teaching on the sacred liturgy and sacred music, as clearly set forth in the Second Vatican Council's Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy, Sacrosanctum Concilium, and succinctly expressed in the statement: "The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value" (no. 112).

More specifically, the Ordo Celebrandi Matrimonium (OCM) governs the celebration of Matrimony and provides for the integration of music within the various parts of the rite: the Entrance Rite, the Liturgy of the Word, the Rite of Marriage itself, and, when celebrated within Mass, the Eucharistic liturgy. Within this structure, certain musical elements are integral to the liturgical celebration and may not be omitted, particularly the Mass settings (Kyrie, Gloria, Sanctus, and Agnus Dei, as appropriate), the Responsorial Psalm, and the Gospel Acclamation.

With regard to musical instruments, the Instruction Musicam Sacram recognizes the pipe organ as holding a privileged place within the liturgical tradition of the Latin Church. Other instruments may be permitted only insofar as they are suitable for sacred worship and contribute to the participation and spiritual edification of the faithful. In this spirit, while the Parish seeks to accommodate the wishes and preferences of the couple whenever possible, the inclusion of additional instruments will be assessed on a case-by-case basis. All such requests will be reviewed by the Director of Sacred Music to ensure conformity with the liturgical nature of the celebration and the norms of the Church.

Liturgical Norms

The "regulation of the sacred liturgy depends solely on the authority of the Church" (Sacrosanctum Concilium, 22 §1). The choice of music for the wedding is governed by the universal law of the Church, liturgical books, and instructions of the Apostolic See.

The Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium) includes these principles relevant to the choice of music for the wedding liturgy:

- The liturgy requires full, conscious, and active participation of the faithful. (14)
- The musical tradition of the universal Church is a treasure of inestimable value. (112)
- The treasure of sacred music is to be preserved and fostered with great care. (114)

Order of Celebrating Matrimony

The Order of Celebrating Matrimony (OCM) is the proper liturgical book governing the Rite of Marriage. It encourages the use of music in these places:

- Introductory Rites
- Liturgy of the Word (especially the Responsorial Psalm, which is an integral part thereof)

- Rite of Marriage
- Eucharistic celebration (when a Nuptial Mass is celebrated)

The marriage of two Catholics is normally celebrated with a Nuptial Mass. Music for the Mass must be performed in accordance with the structure of the liturgy, with particular attention to the Responsorial Psalm, Gospel Acclamation, and the setting for the Ordinary (Holy, Lamb of God, etc.) When the simple Rite of Marriage is celebrated (without Mass), the musical program is arranged in consultation with the Director of Sacred Music.

Parish Guidelines

Music used at weddings must reflect the Church's understanding of the sacramental nature of Matrimony and sustain the prayer of the Church. Liturgical requirements always take precedence over personal musical preferences, since the celebration of Marriage is a public act of the Church and not a private event.

Role of the Director of Sacred Music

The Director of Sacred Music is responsible for implementing these guidelines so that the music used at parish weddings highlights the festive character of the liturgy, fosters the full participation of the congregation, and reflects the dignity of the Sacrament.

The Director of Sacred Music coordinates all musical arrangements for wedding liturgies. In accord with these guidelines, the Director of Sacred Music exercises liturgical and musical discretion regarding the approval of repertoire and all matters related to music in the wedding liturgy.

The Planning Process

Couples are expected to meet with the Director of Sacred Music sufficiently in advance, normally at least two months before the celebration. The Director of Sacred Music commits to working with the couple so that their preferences may be accommodated whenever they are consistent with liturgical principles. While respecting the sensibilities of the couple, musical selection is carried out within a collaborative process governed by the requirements of the liturgical rite. The musical program must be submitted and approved by the Director of Sacred Music no later than one month prior to the wedding. If no agreement is reached within the established timeframe, the Director of Sacred Music will determine the repertoire using the parish's standard liturgical selections. Exceptions may be granted by the Pastor.

Repertoire

As a norm, music is selected from the Catholic liturgical tradition. At the discretion of the Director of Sacred Music, classical instrumental music may also be performed at certain moments of the celebration, provided it is deemed appropriate to the dignity of the liturgy. Contemporary Christian music may be permitted on a case-by-case basis, depending on theological content, liturgical suitability, and stylistic compatibility. Pop, Rock, commercial, cinematic, or otherwise non-liturgical music is not permitted. Recorded music is not allowed.

Musical Instruments

The instruction Musicam Sacram, issued by the Sacred Congregation for Rites, provides that "in the Latin Church the pipe organ is to be held in high esteem" (62). This suggests a preferential status for the organ in the liturgical tradition of the West. Any other instrument used must be suitable for sacred music and contribute to the edification of the faithful (63). Their use must remain rooted in and guided by the teaching and documents of the Church.

Musicians

Musical service is provided by a parish organist and cantor. The Director of Sacred Music is the principal organist of the Parish. The Parish provides a substitute organist, when necessary, always a musician of high quality. In the event of substitution, the appointed organist assumes all functions of the Director of Sacred Music. Guest organists may be authorized by the Director of Sacred Music only for the performance of the prelude and postlude. External musicians (cantors, choirs, instrumentalists) may be admitted only with the approval of the Director of Sacred Music, normally granted when adequate technical competence and familiarity with Catholic liturgy are demonstrated.

Rehearsals

No music is provided during the wedding rehearsal. Any rehearsal involving external musicians must be arranged in advance with the Director of Sacred Music.

Worship aid

A worship aid is provided by the parish to facilitate the participation of the assembly. If a couple wants a more decorative, keepsake program (listing all the attendants and so on) they provide this personally.

Fees for Music

The total fee for the musical service required by a wedding is $650. This includes the services of the organist and cantor, coordination by the Director of Sacred Music, the preliminary meeting with the couple, planning of the musical program, and the production and printing of the worship aid, as well as related organizational tasks for the celebration. The first rehearsal with external musicians is included. Additional rehearsals are charged at $50 each. Additional musicians (instrumentalists, ensembles, choirs) are not included and are arranged separately with the Director of Sacred Music.

These norms are in force as of September 1, 2026 and replace any previous parish regulations concerning sacred music in the celebration of marriage.
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