There is a new document, *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*, that you should read. Everyone who is reading *Today’s Liturgy*, whether you are a musician, priest, religious educator, or member of a parish, should read *Sing to the Lord*. This article serves as both an introduction to and commentary on the document, but do take time to read the document itself.

**What is Sing to the Lord?**

*Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* is a revision of two earlier Church documents, *Music in Catholic Worship* and its companion, *Liturgical Music Today* (1982), and was developed by the Committee on Divine Worship of the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB). *Music in Catholic Worship* was first approved in 1972 and updated in 1983. *Sing to the Lord* was approved by the Latin Church members of the USCCB in November 2007. Technically, *Sing to the Lord* was approved as a set of guidelines, not particular law, for the United States. As the introduction states, “These guidelines are designed to provide direction to those preparing for the celebration of the Sacred Liturgy according to the current liturgical books (in the ordinary form of celebration).” Even though this document discusses the use of Latin and Gregorian chant, it does not discuss the extraordinary form of Mass and the other sacraments and liturgical rites (often called the Tridentine rite).

**The Goals of this Today’s Liturgy Series**

**We Want You to Get It and Read It**

The first purpose of this article is to encourage everyone to obtain a copy of *Sing to the Lord* and read it. It’s available free online at usccb.org/liturgy/SingToTheLord.pdf. If you have been preparing liturgies or serving as a musician, you will probably quickly turn to Section V: The Musical Structure of Catholic Worship and breeze through it to see what’s new or has changed. If you are a priest, you might be surprised at how many references there are to the presider singing. If you have served in ministry for some time, you will probably compare *Sing to the Lord* and *Music in Catholic Worship* to see if the three judgments are still there (they are) and, perhaps, whether the strong statement “Good celebrations foster and nourish faith” has been retained (it has . . . well, almost). You’ll probably also look to see what other of your favorite sections of *Music in Catholic Worship* have survived in the new document. And then you will do one of two things: either you will glance over the rest of the document and set it aside to be read later, or you will set up a study plan to not only read the document, but to spend time with it.

**We Want You to Study It**

The second purpose of this article is to encourage you to set up a plan to study *Sing to the Lord*. If you are responsible for preparing the celebration
of the sacred liturgy, the least amount of time you’ll need to read and digest this document is five hours. The proper amount of time for full study might be as much as five full days of study or even five years. Why so long? Sing to the Lord is 80 pages long. It needs to be that long because it gathers the directives contained in the General Instruction of the Roman Missal (2002) and its rubrics with the General Introduction of the Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (1988), Rite of Baptism of Children (1976), Rite of Confirmation (2006), Rite of Marriage (Latin typical edition 1990, no English translation yet), Rites of Ordination of a Bishop, of Priests, and of Deacons (2003), and Pastoral Care of the Sick (1976). In addition, it reflects the directives regarding music contained in the General Instruction of the Liturgy of the Hours (1971), Sunday Celebrations in the Absence of a Priest (1988), Holy Communion and Worship of the Eucharist Outside of Mass (1974), and the Order of Christian Funerals (1989). This is a lot of material.

The best of us are generally familiar with some of these directives, but few of us know our way around all of them. But there is more. Sing to the Lord provides additional guidelines by interpreting the importance of the international directives and adding pastoral suggestions for applying these guidelines to the United States. Digesting and implementing this new document will take time. Finally, it will take an even longer time to compare it with its predecessor. And why is the comparison useful? Parish practices based on directives in Music in Catholic Worship have now been redirected in Sing to the Lord.

We Want to Help

The third purpose of this series of articles is to assist your reading and study by highlighting what is important in Sing to the Lord. I will do that frequently by keeping an eye on the parallel section in Music in Catholic Worship. This article is not intended to shorten your study time or be a substitute for studying the document itself; it is intended to assist you in your study. This may be slow going, but it is necessary, delightful, and well worth the time and effort. If you are responsible for liturgy on a wider level because you are a diocesan director of liturgy, chair of parish liturgy committee, a music educator, a religious educator or even a parish priest, I encourage you to develop a plan for group study of this document. Group study at the parish level will create a cooperative spirit in its implementation. Group study at the regional or diocesan level will provide a wonderful opportunity to further the liturgical renewal or, indeed, to renew the renewal.

Section I of Sing to the Lord: Why We Sing

Let us begin where Sing to the Lord begins, with Why We Sing.

Here is a summary of the fourteen reasons Sing to the Lord gives us for singing:

1. God gave us the gift of song.
2. “Singing together in church expresses so well the sacramental presence of God to his people.”
3. The Jewish people were instructed to sing.
4. Jesus and his apostles sang.
5. Music strengthens our faith.
6. Our Catholic liturgical tradition uses music to proclaim Christ and to reply with worship and praise.
7. We continue the song of the victory: of the exodus, of the Resurrection, and of the eternal Song of the Lamb.
8. The paschal hymn continues in service outside of Church.
9. Inspired by song, we go forth to spread the Gospel; singing motivates us to action.
10. Sung worship allows us to participate in the action of the Trinity.
11. Sung participation is the source from which the true Christian spirit is derived.
12. Listening to sung prayer lifts our minds to God.
13. Even if we don’t have good singing voices, sung participation comes from our heart.
14. Through song, we honor and glorify the Trinity.

Why do we sing? Why do you sing?
After reading this list, I hope you can see why you need to do more than just skim the document. There are some wonderful reflections in it that not only you, the musician or priest, might use to renew your ministry; they’ll also need to be shared with all the musicians and the whole assembly. Each of these fourteen points is elaborated on in the text of *Sing to the Lord* and would be further enriched by a discussion with others in your parish or diocese.

One way to reflect on this material about why we sing would be to ask yourself the question, why do I sing? Or, perhaps, why do I sing at liturgy? Then compare your real answer with the fourteen reasons given in *Sing to the Lord*. Another good strategy is to compare these statements with the parallel paragraphs in *Music in Catholic Worship* (see numbers 1-9). By doing this, you’d be comparing how liturgy was viewed thirty-five years ago to today’s liturgy.

Here are some observations that are interesting to me:

- *Music in Catholic Worship* called this section a “theology of celebration,” a grandiose description by any measure. *Sing to the Lord* is more modest when it simply says, “Why we sing.”

- One of the most challenging statements in *Music in Catholic Worship* is “Good celebrations foster and nourish faith. Poor celebrations may weaken and destroy” (6). Why was that so challenging for musicians? Because it says that our music making makes a difference in the faith life of the followers of Jesus, and our poor music making matters as much as our good effort! Over the past thirty-five years, this statement has received a great deal of attention. *Sing to the Lord* has retained it with some revisions: “Good celebrations can foster and nourish faith. Poor celebrations may weaken it” (5). The careful reader will notice the theologian’s nuance in the new version. The word “can” has been added to the verbs “foster” and “nourish,” and in the second sentence, the phrase “weaken and destroy” omits “destroy” to become just “weaken.” Is this just a linguistic preference, or is it a theological reflection?
Theologians would argue that, theologically, the liturgy cannot destroy faith, while the parish practitioner might easily understand how true the original statement seems to be in people’s lives. The point here is that Sing to the Lord attempts to provide a theological corrective, based on thirty-five years of reflection, to the pastoral exuberance reflected in Music in Catholic Worship, which was written in the rush following the Second Vatican Council. In my opinion, that same theological reflection will benefit Sing to the Lord over the coming years.

One example of such theological reflection might be in its comments on participation at numbers 10-14. The famous statement from the Second Vatican Council is quoted in this section: “‘The full and active participation by all the people is the aim to be considered before all else, for it is the primary and indispensable source from which the faithful are to derive the true Christian spirit’” (11).

In theological circles, there have been discussions about the meaning of actuoso (active) and especially of participatio (participation). The theological school maintains that participation gains its primary meaning in liturgy from the fact that that assembly takes part (participates) in the activity of God. The historical school remembers the inactivity of the assembly during the Mass. The assembly was rendered inactive and non-participatory by the gradual assumption of all functions into the sanctuary, an assumption reduced, in the years before Vatican II, to the role played by altar boys at a Missa recitata (a spoken or “quiet” Mass) while the congregation followed along using hand missals or prayed the rosary or other devotions. For the historical school, active participation was a call to the assembly to assume its rightful place in taking part, that is, participating, in the liturgical action itself.

Whatever you make of the theological reflections and however useful you find the comparisons of Music in Catholic Worship to this new document, we remain with two important questions: Why do we sing? Why do you sing? These are questions well worth the time for reflection.

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