



Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship A Commentary

PART 2 OF 4 IN A SERIES

THE CHURCH AT PRAYER

The second section of *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship* is titled “The Church at Prayer.” It deals with those responsible for music or, as the document states, “the principal persons and elements that should guide both the development and use of sacred music in the Liturgy” (15).

The guides for the development and use of sacred music in the liturgy named here include persons and elements of church life. First come the persons: the bishop, priest, deacon, gathered liturgical assembly, and ministers of liturgical music (choir, psalmist, cantor, organist and other instrumentalists, and director of music ministries). Next come the elements of church life that relate to musical liturgy: the leadership and formation of the persons, music in Catholic schools, diverse cultures and languages, and Latin in the liturgy.

Because this is a pastoral document that provides guidelines for the United States, it begins with a discussion of the bishop and his staff and then the roles of the priest and deacon. While some may interpret this approach as hierarchical, such an evaluation would be offset by the fact that the document does not mention the international commission (ICEL) nor the pope or the Vatican commission (Congregation for Divine Worship) and its various committees (e.g., Vox Clara).

Below is more information on each subsection in “The Church at Prayer.”

The Bishop (Paragraphs 16–17)

A directive for the universal Church in the *Constitution on the Liturgy (CSL)* in 1964 proposes that “every diocese, as far as possible, should have a commission for sacred music” (CSL 46). In *Sing to the Lord*, that same directive has become: “The bishop is assisted in his role by his staff in the diocesan Office of Worship and/or the diocesan music or liturgical commission, which provides ‘valuable assistance in promoting sacred music together with pastoral liturgical action in the diocese’” (17). *Sing to the Lord* recognizes that, in the US, paid staff has often overshadowed volunteer commissions in practice.

The Priest (Paragraphs 18–21)

Sing to the Lord boldly restates the directives, largely ignored in pastoral practice, that the priest and the deacon are encouraged to sing the liturgy.¹ This clear expectation should be contrasted with the expectation in *Music in Catholic Worship* that the priest’s role “is enhanced when he is capable of rendering some of the parts in song” (22). To encourage priests and deacons to assume their proper role, *Sing to the Lord* provides some very concrete guidelines:

For the priest

- Sing the dialogues, such as “The Lord be with you,” the acclamations at the end of the Gospel, and the introductory dialogue of the Eucharistic Prayer
- Sing when the assembly sings, except the memorial acclamation and Amen because these are in a call-and-response format
- Carry a worship aid and sing during the opening procession
- Attend to the psalmist and cantor
- When the assembly sings, sing without being heard over the assembly. The microphone can be turned off if necessary

For the deacon

- Sing the dialogue at the Gospel and dismissal
- Sing the invitation “Let us pray” of the litanies, the Exsultet, the third form of the Penitential Rite, and the prayers of the faithful

The Gathered Liturgical Assembly (Paragraphs 24–27)

Sing to the Lord identifies three concerns that have faced the assembly over the years but are presented as current and containing some new urgency: division in the assembly, the musical formation of the assembly, and introducing new music. Regarding division, *Sing to the Lord* poses interesting questions for those studying this document: What divisions exist in your parish

community, and which of them can be overcome by congregational song? How can the faithful “shun any appearance of individualism or division” (24)?

When discussing musical formation, the document notes that “singing is one of the primary ways that the assembly participates actively in the Liturgy.... The musical formation of the assembly must be a continuing concern in order to foster full, conscious, and active participation” (26). Musicians, priests, deacons, and bishops are invited to participate in the musical formation of the assembly. The study question at the parish level, of course, becomes how.

Regarding the introduction of new music, the document suggests that “a pastoral judgment must be made in all cases” (27), particularly when deciding how often and when to introduce music. Unfortunately, the document doesn’t provide more specific guidelines on how to go about this, but it includes that pastoral judgment remains the responsibility and challenge of the parish musicians and clergy reading and studying *Sing to the Lord*.

Ministers of Liturgical Music (Paragraphs 28–47)

Sing to the Lord presents a more comprehensive description of the ministers of music than *Music in Catholic Worship* did. Thirty-five years of pastoral practice have shown just how vital the musician is to good liturgical celebrations. This section expands on and develops the rationale for choirs, who were often neglected during the rush to liturgical reform. This section restates the roles of the psalmist and cantor as described in other documents (e.g., the *General Instruction of the Roman Missal* and the introduction to the Lectionary). It also mentions—for the first time in an official document—the director of music ministries, an important overseer of liturgical music in every parish.

The Choir (Paragraphs 28–33)

The choir is discussed in paragraphs 28–33 and is affirmed as it always has been in the official documents, but *Sing to the Lord* places special emphasis on the choir by having it first in order of discussion. The document identifies the proper role of the choir in relation to assembly participation when it says, “The choir must not minimize the participation of the faithful” (28) since assembly participation is primary. Choir members are to be drawn from the assembly as opposed to being paid musicians from outside the parish; they should attend rehearsals and possess requisite musical skills.

The document defines “ensembles” as another form of choir that commonly includes a combination of singers and instrumentalists. For the first time in an official document, *Sing to the Lord* combines choirs with ensembles, though it’s worth noting that *Music in Catholic Worship* combined instrumentalists with organists (37).

Sing to the Lord provides specific directives for when the choir (and, therefore, ensembles) should sing:

The choir sings by alternating with the assembly during the

- Litanies, Kyrie, and Agnus Dei
- Gloria or Creed, when composed with antiphons
- Three processional songs

The choir may sing alone during the

- Prelude
- Entrance chant
- Preparation of gifts
- Communion procession
- Time after the reception of Communion

The choir and/or ensemble are encouraged to sing proper liturgical texts, but *Sing to the Lord* is not restrictive in these matters, recommending appropriate repertory from the sacred treasury, either a proper liturgical text or a text expressing themes appropriate to the liturgy.

Also, the choir director does not conduct the choir when the assembly is singing so as not to give the impression that the choir is replacing the assembly’s song. Nor does the choir “lead congregational singing, but...sing[s] with the congregation” (31). The document states, in a positive way, that the choir and/or ensemble members “should participate in the entire liturgical celebration” (32). Now that there’s a shortage of clergy and a desire to reestablish clerical distinctions, choir robes designed as cassocks should be avoided.

The Psalmist (Paragraphs 34–36) and Cantor (37–40)

Sometimes it’s hard to tell whether the psalmist and cantor are two roles or one. In the Roman documents, the psalmist is distinct from the cantor and the cantor is seen in relationship to the choir, either as the choir director or as a possible substitute for a choir (*General Instruction of the Roman Missal* 104). In the United States, we have linked the roles of psalmist and cantor. *Music in Catholic Worship* did this explicitly when it proclaimed the “psalm sung between the readings” as a duty of the cantor (35). While *Sing to the Lord* continues the practice of combining the roles of cantor and psalmist by referring to the psalmist as “cantor of the psalm” (34) and stating that “the cantor may serve as psalmist” (37), it recognizes the Roman legislation with the statement, “Although [the psalmist’s role] is distinct from the role of cantor, the two ministries are often entrusted to the same person” (34). The point here is that both *Music in Catholic Worship* and its successor *Sing to the Lord* are pastoral documents providing guidelines for implementing liturgical legislation in pastoral settings in the United States. In this case, limited resources and the multiplication of liturgies modify liturgical practice. But take notice: *Sing to the Lord* is aware of accommodation based on pastoral practice. Therefore, when accommodation is not supported due to pastoral practice, as is the

case when presiders are encouraged to sing, those guidelines become even stronger.

The pastoral directives for the cantor remain those that have been encouraged by National Association of Pastoral Musicians (NPM) cantor training programs for the past thirty-five years:

- The cantor leads those dialogues *Sing to the Lord* assigns to the choir, when the choir is not present
- The cantor should control the volume of his or her voice when the assembly is singing
- Gestures should be modest and should not be designed to direct the assembly
- The cantor does not need to be seen every time the assembly sings, especially if the assembly knows its musical role
- The cantor, in performing his or her roles, does not use the ambo or wear a cassock

The Organist and Other Instrumentalists (Paragraphs 41–44)

When the directives for organists and instrumentalists in *Music in Catholic Worship* are compared with those in *Sing to the Lord*, the changes that have occurred between 1972 and 2007 are revealed. Solo organ performance is mentioned first in *Music in Catholic Worship* but last in *Sing to the Lord*, for example, and improvisation is encouraged in *Sing to the Lord*. Also, *Music in Catholic Worship* cannot resist discussing the location of organs under the topic of organists, while *Sing to the Lord* appropriately distinguishes between the organist, the organ as an instrument, and the repertoire of music for organ.

But the major difference between the two documents appears in directives for when the organ should serve as a solo instrument. Organists should note the changes. *Music in Catholic Worship* specified that the organ could be used as a solo instrument in the following ways: “an instrumental prelude, a soft background to a spoken psalm, at the preparation of the gifts in place of singing, during the procession of the communion rite, and the recessional” (37). *Sing to the Lord*, on the other hand, states that “the organ or other instruments may be played alone, such as a prelude before the Mass, an instrumental piece during the Preparation of Gifts, a recessional if there is no closing song, or a postlude following the closing song” (44).

Notice that two items are deleted from *Music in Catholic Worship*'s list: use of the organ to provide a soft background to a spoken psalm and during the procession of the Communion rite. Both of those deal with mood music. Organists who currently play extended instrumental music during Communion might want to take notice of this change and the more complete directives regarding music at Communion at paragraphs 189–197; the directives for instrumental solos during the liturgy are useful as well and appear in paragraph 91.

While *Sing to the Lord* is a document influenced by pastoral practice, it keeps a very strong commitment, in spite of some poor pastoral practice, to singing by the assembly during Communion. It does not encourage organ or instrumental music that replaces the non-singing assembly.

Director of Music Ministries (Paragraphs 45–47)

The director of music ministries is identified as a unique role in parish ministry by this title for the first time in any official document, a tribute to the work of the National Association of Pastoral Musicians in identifying this important pastoral ministry.

Leadership and Formation (Paragraphs 48–53)

At first glance, the remaining elements in this section of *Sing to the Lord*—leadership and formation, music in Catholic schools, diverse cultures and languages, and Latin in the liturgy—may appear disparate, and with reason. But they are also linked by the liturgy's need for competent and pastoral leadership.

The leadership provided by the pastoral musician over the past thirty-five years has been increasingly recognized at official ecclesial levels, most recently by the US Catholic bishops' recognition of lay ecclesial ministry in the 2005 document *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry*. Musicians themselves are increasingly speaking in terms of vocation or of being called by God to serve the community. *Sing to the Lord* recognizes the tensions in these developments by affirming that the musician is, first of all, a baptized disciple and, additionally, an individual serving in a “genuine liturgical ministry” (50).

Music in Catholic Schools (Paragraphs 54–56)

Sing to the Lord's guidelines for salary, benefits, and supplies are related to musicians' competency in formation, education, and skills. “Professional directors of music ministries and part-time pastoral music ministers should each receive appropriate wages and benefits that affirm the dignity of their work” (52); they should also be “provided with the proper resources to carry out their administrative functions in a professional manner” (53).

For far too long, the importance of the Catholic music educator, especially in Catholic schools, has been overlooked. *Sing to the Lord* points to the importance of assisting students to become singers, the formative value of school liturgies, and the formation of school choirs in a variety of musical styles. What seems to be overlooked in the document, though, is a recognition of the importance of hiring and paying a

classroom teacher for music, and this is unfortunate. Musical formation in the schools requires the competent leadership of a Catholic music educator. As in the musical formation of the assembly, music education doesn't just happen!

Diverse Cultures and Languages (Paragraphs 57–60)

Diversity characterizes the United States. In 1972, *Music in Catholic Worship* stated that “for the composer and performer alike...must enhance the liturgy with new creations of variety and richness” (76; also see 16–18). That experimental variety and richness, so common in the 1970s, has been refocused on cultural diversity and language. *Sing to the Lord* recommends the newly developed bilingual and multilingual musical repertoire be part of the pastoral liturgist's choices for appropriate liturgical music.

Latin in the Liturgy (Paragraphs 61–66)

The vision for pastoral and liturgical ways to cope with diversity also draws on the international experience of the use of Latin as a unifying force. The special section on Latin in the liturgy gathers the current directives for the use of Latin in the parish liturgy and in international and multicultural celebrations. Gregorian chant is treated under its own section but, as noted in the introduction, the extraordinary form of the Roman Church's liturgy (the pre-1962 rites) is not addressed in *Sing to the Lord*.

Who guides the development and use of sacred music in the liturgy of your parish or diocese? *Sing to the Lord* offers a wide range of suggestions that every diocese and parish, every priest and musician, should spend time reflecting on and implementing in the worship setting. We are responsible for “the Church at prayer.”

Note: Please remember my commentary is not meant to replace the careful reading and study of *Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship*; instead, it intends to highlight items based on my twenty-five years of experience in the field of pastoral music. *Sing to the Lord* is available from OCP (ocp.org/20995TL).

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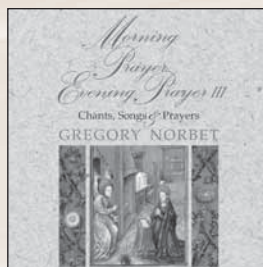
¹Quoting MDW, footnote 33: “The documents of the post-conciliar liturgical renewal repeatedly commend the ideal of a sung Liturgy...” See MS, nos. 29–31; *Lectionary for Mass (Second Typical Edition): Introduction*...no. 17; GIRM no. 40.

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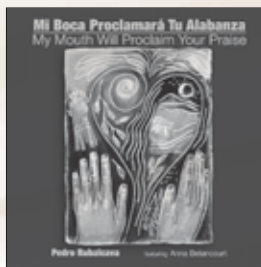
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