

**MUSIC GUIDELINES**  
**FOR A CATHOLIC WEDDING**

**Catholic Diocese of Buffalo**

Prepared by the Music Committee of the  
Buffalo Diocesan Liturgical Commission  
October 2003

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## **Music Guidelines for a Catholic Wedding**

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*Especially at marriage, great care should be taken that all the people are involved at the important moments of the celebration...and, above all, that the liturgy is a prayer for all present,...*  
(--MUSIC IN CATHOLIC WORSHIP)

Life is punctuated with music, from the ordinary moments of driving in the car with the radio playing to the more singular moments of humming a lull-a-bye to a sleepy newborn or singing the national anthem when our country's athlete wins the gold medal. Music – especially singing together – allows us to experience the height and breadth of love. Our minds and hearts – even our bodies – soar with good music. So when we gather as baptized people to give praise and thanks to God, we sing the liturgy, too, and take up every instrument we are able to play well to make music before God.

The wedding you will celebrate soon is a liturgy, too. Gathering your family and friends, you and your beloved will give thanks and praise to God by professing your love for each other. And all of us will see in the love that you have for each other something of the great love that God has for the human race, the love-unto-death that Christ has for his bride, the church. Perhaps, without music, would your wedding would fall

flat, lack joy, even seem sad? Using inappropriate music – the love song from the latest Broadway show, for example – could reduce your solemn celebration to a cliché. (Is your love really no different, no deeper, than what is staged in this year’s blockbuster?) But using the best music available to you – instrumental music that has proven its beauty by withstanding the test of time, hearty hymns that are truly poetry set to music, strong acclamations that all the baptized can sing from their souls – using the best music will set your wedding apart, lead you and the church gathered around you into God’s presence, and literally begin your married life in harmonies worthy of angel choirs.

But how do you know what music to choose? Spend some time with and trust the liturgical music minister in your parish. Would you entrust the making of your wedding gown to an amateur who has no training in dressmaking? Would you hire a caterer for your reception who only dabbles in cooking? You’ll even choose a DJ for your reception who has knowledge, training and experience in getting everyone off their chairs and on to the dance floor. Your parish’s liturgical music minister has knowledge of music and liturgy, training in accompaniment, and experience in getting everyone present to sing from their hearts. Work closely with him or her and your wedding music will be the better for it.

To assist you and your parish music minister, the Music Committee of the Buffalo Diocesan Liturgical Commission has prepared these guidelines, with the approval of our bishop. These guidelines represent the pooled wisdom of many church

Psalm XIX, Benedetto Marcello  
Canon in D, Johann Pachelbel  
Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring, J. S. Bach  
Alla Hornpipe, G. F. Handel  
Symphony of Fanfare (Rondeau), J. J. Mouret  
Rigaudon, Andre Campra  
In Thee Is Gladness, J. S. Bach  
Suite Gothique (various movements), Leon Boellman

***Examples of Inappropriate Music***

Sunrise, Sunset  
Theme from Ice Castles  
Amazing Grace  
Because  
All I Ask of You (*Phantom*)  
We've Only Just Begun

Any "Love Song" not speaking of *Christian* love  
that would be appropriate at a wedding *reception*.

musicians and pastoral leaders. This may be the first – and only – time you have to choose music for a wedding, but we have worked with many couples over many years. And we have come to know what works and what doesn't. We invite you to trust our experience as it is outlined here. Our only concern is that your Catholic wedding be the best experience of liturgy that it can be.

**Criteria for Choosing Music**

The United States' Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy published an excellent guide to music in liturgy called *Music in Catholic Worship*. It says that the best way to choose music for liturgy, including your wedding, is to judge the piece of music according to three criteria: the musical, the liturgical and the pastoral.

The musical judgment asks: "Is the music technically, aesthetically, and expressively good?" This speaks of quality, not taste. Whether the piece of music is classical or contemporary, jazz or gospel, the musical judgment asks, "Is this piece of music the best quality it can be?" Your wedding deserves only the best. And musical quality is not determined by whether or not "I like it." Musical quality is best judged according to standards of beauty and skill – standards that your parish music minister is trained in discerning.

The liturgical judgment asks: Does this piece of music fit the liturgy and work well with what the liturgy is trying to do? An aria from an opera might be exquisite from the musical

judgment: In terms of musical quality, it doesn't get any better than this. But the liturgy properly understood does not offer much opportunity for solo singing, and singing about being lovesick because the one you love doesn't love you back is not at all what the liturgy celebrates.

The pastoral judgment asks: Will this piece of music enable the liturgy to be a prayer for all present and not just a theatrical production? The primary kind of music in the liturgy is communal singing. Replacing the Lord's Prayer with a soloist singing a classical rendition of the prayer is a bad idea, for example, because it literally takes the words out of the mouth of all present. Better to have all sing the chant that all know than to have a soloist "steal" the prayer.

#### Avoid Show Tunes and the Top Ten

From the good three-part criteria of musical, liturgical and pastoral judgments, it's pretty clear why love songs from musicals and the current top ten list from radio or MTV don't measure up. Such songs aren't bad in and of themselves – and in fact, the DJ that you hire will probably ask you for a list of such songs that you like. Play them at the reception, but leave them out of church.

Secular music is not to be used prior to or during the liturgy. Music creates the environment in which the liturgy will be celebrated and the sacrament of marriage made present. Music and the texts chosen must reflect and embody this. Music before the liturgy will not only accompany the arrival of your

Table of Plenty  
Take the Word of God With You  
Sing of the Lord's Goodness

*from* World Library Publications  
(available as separate octavos)  
A Song of Ruth  
Set Your Heart on the Higher Gifts  
An Irish Blessing  
Arise, My Love!  
May You Cling to Wisdom  
Make of Our Hands a Throne  
Christ be Near at Either Hand

#### Responsorial Psalm Settings

Psalms traditionally used at a wedding are:  
Psalms 33, 34, 103, 112, 128, 145 and 148.  
Musical settings of these psalms can be found in the  
liturgical publications listed above.  
*Please note that what is chosen here should be a "psalm"  
and not just a liturgical "song" in responsorial style.*

#### Processionals / Recessionals

Trumpet Voluntary, Jeremiah Clarke  
Trumpet Tune, Henry Purcell  
*various* Voluntaries, John Stanley  
*various* Trumpet Tunes, David Johnson

## Hymns

*from Worship, Third Edition, GIA Publications, Inc.*

May the Grace of Christ Our Savior  
Within Your House, O God, Today  
O Father, All-creating  
When Love Is Found  
Love Divine, All Loves Excelling  
Joyful, Joyful, We Adore You  
Gift of Finest Wheat

*from Gather Comprehensive, GIA Publications, Inc.*

Wherever You Go  
God, in the Planning  
We Will Serve the Lord  
A Nuptial Blessing  
Blessing the Marriage  
In Love We Choose to Live  
One Bread, One Body  
I Have Loved You

*from Oregon Catholic Press Missal Publications*

Lives Brought Together  
May God Bless You  
Hear Us Now, Our God and Father  
Where There is Love  
Gather Us Together

guests, but also help prepare everyone to lift up their hearts to God. Keep in mind that any song, inappropriate because of its text, is also inappropriate as an instrumental version, since the tune alone will convey the song's words to those members of the assembly who know the song. In effect, a song can never be truly separated from its lyrics.

### Can We Employ Other Musicians?

Ask your parish musician and the priest with whom you are preparing regarding policies on visiting organists, soloists, the use of other instrumentalists and the like. Do this well in advance of your wedding date. The professional expertise of your parish music minister and priest can make your planning less frustrating, and the musical results more exciting. You should know that there might be additional financial obligations when you bring in visiting or additional musicians. Good musicians deserve to be paid fairly, and if additional rehearsal times are needed to coordinate an ensemble of musicians who may not have played together before, or who do not play or sing together regularly, justice demands that all be paid for their time and their skill.

### May We Print a Booklet?

You may want to print a program booklet for your wedding, especially if it will encourage all to sing their parts of the liturgy. A booklet can be most helpful in assisting your guests, especially those from other faith communities, with their participation in your wedding liturgy. If you plan to print song

texts or music in your program, reprint permission must be obtained from the copyright holder. Acknowledgment of this permission will usually be required in your program. If you do not do this, you or your parish could be sued in court and fined. The parish musician can usually offer guidance in the preparation of a program booklet.

What follows is an outline of the wedding liturgy. A Catholic wedding is usually celebrated within the context of a Mass, but not always. Whether your wedding is celebrated with Mass or without is something that you should decide with your priest at your first meeting. If your wedding is celebrated without a Mass, you simply skip the section “Liturgy of the Eucharist” below.

*Examples of Appropriate Music*

**Collections of Organ Music**

Music for Wedding Services...An Ecumenical Collection

Novalis Publishing, Canada

Festive Organ Music compiled by Joyce Jones

Word Music

Fifty Elevations and Sixty Devotional Pieces,

Dom Paul Benoit, O.S.B.

J. Fischer & Bros. / Belwin-Mills

Wedding Music and Wedding Music Part 2

Concordia Publishing House

Five Postludes, John Lee

GIA Publications, Inc.

Sixty Short Pieces, Flor Peeters

H. W Gray Publications / Belwin-Mills

Wedding Music for Manuals, Charles Callahan, Editor

Concordia Publishing House

Preludes and Postludes for Manuals, Vols. 1-5,

Charles Callahan, Editor

Concordia Publishing House

Eight Little Preludes and Fugues, J. S Bach

Various Publishers

Kleines Orgelbuch, Ernst Pepping

B. Schotts Sohne

The following examples and resources are presented as a source to help both the wedding couple and parish musician choose appropriate musical selections. The parish musician may have many more examples to share and may indeed *not* have all the examples listed below. Some *inappropriate* examples are also listed to better understand the principles set forth in *Music in Catholic Worship*.

### Wedding Resource Materials

The following companies offer musical resource materials for weddings ranging from books pertaining to the rite of marriage to music appropriate for the rite itself.

*GIA Publications, Inc.*  
7404 South Mason Avenue  
Chicago, IL 60638-9927  
1-800-442-1358  
www.giamusic.com

*Oregon Catholic Press*  
5536 NE Hassalo  
Portland, OR 97213-3638  
1-800-548-8749  
www.ocp.org

### The Rite of Christian Marriage

*Items **in bold** are to be chosen during a meeting with the parish musician.*

*Musical selections **not in bold** are best selected by the parish musician. These are acclamations sung during the liturgy that the parish musician would choose due to their familiarity to most in attendance.*

**Processional: This music sets the tone for the celebration, unites the assembly, and accompanies the entire liturgical procession, including the groom and bride. The selection begins when the ministry leaves the sacristy and concludes when all are in their places. A single instrumental piece or one hymn of praise sung by the entire assembly should be used.**

### Liturgy of the Word

First Reading

**Responsorial Psalm: An appropriate psalm including a response easily sung by the assembly should be chosen.**

Second Reading

Gospel Acclamation: A proper seasonal acclamation sung by the assembly.

Gospel

Homily

*Rite of Marriage*  
*Declaration of Consent*  
*Proclamation of Vows*  
*Exchange of Rings*

Prayer of the Faithful

Liturgy of the Eucharist

**Preparation of the Gifts and Altar: At this time the music accompanies the procession of bread and wine to the altar, and the preparation of these gifts. Options include a hymn or vocal solo (with the text speaking of Christian love or praise and thanksgiving to God) or instrumental music.**

Holy, Holy: an acclamation sung by the assembly.

Memorial Acclamation: an acclamation sung by the assembly.

Great Amen: an acclamation sung by the assembly.

Communion Rite

Lord's Prayer: The Lord's Prayer is generally recited. Any musical setting used must provide for the participation of the priest and all present. A vocal solo is inappropriate.

Nuptial Blessing

Sign of Peace: Music, instrumental or vocal, is not called for during this part of the Communion Rite.

Lamb of God: A litany-song that generally includes a response by the assembly.

**Communion Song: The best choice for music during the reception of communion is a hymn containing a simple refrain for the assembly with verses sung by a cantor. A hymn to Mary is not appropriate at this point, rather, the text should speak of the Eucharist or praise and thanksgiving to God.**

Concluding Rite

Blessing and Dismissal

**Recessional: The recessional music should impart a sense of joy and "sending forth" to the entire assembly as the rite concludes.**