

# WEDDING MUSIC GUIDELINES

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In the document, *Music in Catholic Worship*, the U.S. Bishops' Committee on the Liturgy recommends that the music used in all types of worship be evaluated on three levels: musically, liturgically, and pastorally. First of all, is the music technically, aesthetically and expressively good? Secondly, does the music respect the nature of the liturgy itself with the participants assuming different roles in the various levels of communal prayer? Finally, does the music help the people involved to express their faith in their particular place, age and culture?

As an aid in supplying these principles to the wedding service, it is helpful to consider the music under three categories: liturgical songs, supplementary songs, and instrumental music. [Items marked with an asterisk (\*) apply only when the Eucharist is celebrated.]

## LITURGICAL SONGS

These include those sung parts of the worship in which all present should ideally take part. Often the circumstances at most weddings do not permit congregational singing to the same extent as at a normal Sunday Mass. But with a good organist or other instrumentalist and a cantor or choir who is able to sing verses alternating with congregational refrains, or at least a priest who is not afraid to help lead the singing, there are many realistic possibilities.

There are also many hymns that are common to most Christian denominations. These can be especially useful for celebrations at which many non-Catholic Christians are present.

*The Opening Song* is important in creating an atmosphere for celebration and in helping people to become conscious of themselves as a worshipping community. At most weddings, it is usually preferable to accompany the actual procession with instrumental music and then begin the song itself when all have arrived at their places.

*The Responsorial Psalm* should be sung if a cantor is available, with the congregation normally singing the refrain.

*The Gospel Acclamation* which prepares the congregation to hear the Word of God proclaimed in the Gospel reading need seldom be omitted since little or no congregational practice is needed. After the cantor or choir sings the alleluias, the assembly repeats them. Then a verse is sung by the cantor, and all repeat the alleluias a second time. In the absence of a cantor, the priest could intone the alleluias (with or without accompaniment).

*The Eucharistic Prayer Acclamations\** (Holy, Memorial, Amen) are important means of involving the congregation in the proclamation of the Eucharistic Prayer. It seems especially

important that the Holy always be sung. The other two acclamations can also be sung first by the cantor or choir and then repeated by all.

*A Communion Song\** - used during or following the distribution of communion - is very effective in expressing the oneness of the couple and the assembly in the Eucharistic Lord. If sung during communion, a short, easy refrain is best for the congregation with the cantor or choir singing the verses. If it is sung after communion, several verses of a regular hymn sung by all are quite effective. Other songs and responses that may be sung include the *Lord, have mercy\**, *Glory to God*, *General Intercessions\**, *Lord's Prayer\** and *Lamb of God\**.

## SUPPLEMENTARY SONGS

This category includes songs for which there are no specified texts nor any requirement that there be a spoken or sung text (for example, during the preparation of the gifts\*, before or after the congregational communion song\*, and during the recessional). Here, a choir or a soloist may play a fuller role for there is no question of usurping the parts that belong to the whole assembly.

However, it should be noted that these songs should emphasize and enhance that part of the ceremony where they occur and not simply be "show pieces." They should help the community participate in the liturgical action and prayer which is taking place. The music should be suitable for use in a religious, liturgical service whose primary concern is the worship of God which achieves the sanctification of people. The lyrics of the songs should be drawn chiefly from Sacred Scripture and other liturgical sources and should express a Christian concept of love, since the liturgy of marriage celebrates not only the love between two persons, but also their relationship to God who is Love.

## INSTRUMENTAL MUSIC

Instrumental music performed on the organ or other instruments can provide suitable accompaniment during certain parts of the service including the processional and the recessional, as well as during the preparation of the gifts\* and before or after the communion song.\* In most cases, pieces written specifically for the instrument to be used will sound the best. However, if instrumental transcriptions of vocal pieces are used, the criteria for choosing supplementary songs should be applied.

## ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For further information and repertoire suggestions, see *Handbook of Church Music for Weddings* available from Liturgy Training Publications, 800-933-1800, [www.ltp.org](http://www.ltp.org). A simple handout for wedding couples entitled *Your Wedding Music* is available from the same publisher.

## USING 'POPULAR' MUSIC

The use of popular love songs at weddings presents some challenging questions. It is quite understandable that many couples should think of using such "special" songs in their weddings, and just because a particular piece happens to be "popular" does not *automatically* make it unsuitable for use as a supplementary song during the wedding liturgy. But couples must be challenged to honestly ask the question: "Will this song help us *and* the rest of the assembly to lift up our hearts in prayer?"

In a Common Policy Statement, the Dioceses of Wisconsin provide further clarifications:

*While such songs themselves ought to be as musically attractive as possible, it is the text that matters most. At least implicitly, each and every text ought to be identifiable as prayer. If it cannot, then it is out of place in a liturgical context. Thus, a song which highlights the Christian dimension of human love always deserves priority:*

- *a song which speaks directly of the divine / religious dimension of love is most suitable at a Christian marriage;*
- *a song which does not speak directly of the divine / religious dimensions of love, but which implies it is suitable at a Christian marriage;*
- *a song which negates either explicitly or implicitly the divine / religious dimension of love is unsuitable at a Christian marriage.*

*The priest in cooperation with the parish musicians and the bride and groom will have to decide whether the text of a piece is appropriate. Often, the priest most effectively help a couple evaluate whether the text of the songs they are considering reflect the faith they wish to express. It is unfair for the priest to tell the bride and groom, "This is all right with me, but you should check it out with the organist." It is unfair to tell the musician, "The wedding is the bride's day; let her have what she wants." Rather, the priest should ask the couple, "Can you pray these words? Will the community that will gather around you on your wedding day understand the meaning you are trying to express?"*