MINISTRY OF PARISH MUSIC CO-ORDINATOR

“O praise him with sound of trumpet, praise him with lute and harp. Praise him with timbrel and dance, praise him with strings and pipes.” (Psalm 150)

PARTICIPATION

Like all liturgical ministers, parish music coordinators are first and foremost members of the worshipping community, called to full, conscious and active participation along with their fellow parishioners. Together they pray and worship, listen attentively to the word of God, offer praise and thanks, celebrate the sacramental life of the church, and go out to live the gospel. [Cf. Sing to the Lord (2007) 10-11]

THE MINISTRY

The parish music coordinator oversees and orchestrates the music for the community’s liturgical celebrations, always with the primary aim of enabling the assembly to find its voice.

Thus, the parish music coordinator “fosters the active participation of the liturgical assembly in singing; coordinates the preparation of music to be sung at various liturgical celebrations; and promotes the ministries of choirs, psalmists, cantors, organists, and all who play instruments that serve the Liturgy.” [Sing to the Lord (2007) 45]

Some parishes will engage a professional music coordinator. Others will rely on a qualified volunteer whose gifts have been recognised. In some other parishes the task may of necessity be undertaken by a person who is not professionally qualified, but such “accidental” ministers can grow in the role.

The ministry of the music coordinator calls for four interrelated and overlapping competencies:

- liturgical, musical, pastoral, and organisational.


LITURGICAL EXPERTISE

Music coordinators appreciate the liturgy as the “summit and fount” of the Church’s life. They understand how the liturgy celebrates the paschal mystery of Christ and enables the people of God to worship in spirit and in truth.

They are well informed about the norms that guide and govern the celebration of liturgy as found in official church documents such as the:

- Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy
- General Introduction to the Roman Missal
- Lectionary for Mass: Introduction
- Directory for Masses with Children
- On Preparing and Celebrating the Paschal Feasts
- Universal Norms on the Liturgical Year and the General Roman Calendar
• the church’s ritual books, including the Roman Missal, Rite of Christian Initiation, Order of Christian Funerals, Rite of Marriage, Rite of Penance, and Liturgy of the Hours.

They are familiar with the third and fullest publication on music in the liturgy issued by the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops:

• Sing to the Lord (2007).

They are attuned to the various rhythms of the church’s worship:

• the annual cycle of Advent, Christmas, Lent, Easter and Ordinary Time, centred on the Paschal Triduum
• the weekly cycle focussed on Sunday, the Lord’s Day
• the daily cycle framed by Morning and Evening Prayer.

They are familiar with:

• the shape and dynamic of the Mass
• the elements of marriage, funeral and reconciliation rites
• key annual liturgies, especially those of the Paschal Triduum, plus Ash Wednesday, Palm/Passion Sunday, Christmas Day, ANZAC Day, RCIA rites, Confirmation, First Holy Communion and parish festivals.

They are well acquainted with:

• the Ordo, the authoritative annual calendar and guide to liturgical celebrations in Australia
• the books and symbols used in the liturgy
• the overall layout of the parish liturgical space, its key furnishings and their role in the Mass and other rites of the Church, and the place for music ministry.

Most importantly, they are convinced about the critical role of silence in the celebration of liturgy. “Silence in the Liturgy allows the community to reflect on what it has heard and experienced, and to open its heart to the mystery celebrated. Ministers and pastoral musicians should take care that the rites unfold with the proper ebb and flow of sound and silence.” [Sing to the Lord (2007) 118]

Music coordinators bring all this liturgical expertise to the timely meetings that are arranged for the preparation and evaluation of parish liturgies.

MUSICAL EXPERTISE

Competent parish music coordinators have achieved proficiency in instrumental performance and accompaniment, in vocal performance, and in choral conducting.

It is desirable that they have the capacity to adapt and re-score compositions to suit the musical and vocal forces they have at their disposal.

They have the facility to discern the musical abilities and limits of those who volunteer as musicians and/or singers.
They are sufficiently qualified to train musicians, singers and choristers to a level acceptable for parish liturgical celebration.

They are informed about the range of instruments available to assist the parish’s worship and able to combine them to the best advantage.

They are aware of the acoustic character of the parish church and are practised in the use of its sound systems.

They are well acquainted with both long-published and current liturgical music repertoire.

They know the distinguishing characteristics and relative importance of the diverse musical forms used in liturgy: antiphons, acclamations, responses, chants, psalmody, hymnody, litanies, anthems and instrumental music.

If serving in the role of accompanist, they have the ability to extemporise and to adapt to unplanned and unexpected variations in the celebration.

They have a well-grounded realisation that, no matter what particular facet of their role they are fulfilling, they are engaged in a ministry, not in a performance that draws attention to themselves or to their talents. Their gifts are always at the service of the liturgy and the assembly.

**PASTORAL EXPERTISE**

Parish music coordinators need to have the capacity to interact with and gain the willing cooperation of all the parish music ministers and, where applicable, the staff of the parish school.

They exercise their ministry in harmony with other liturgical ministers:

- the assembly (the primary minister)
- the presiding minister, readers, Extraordinary Ministers of Communion, servers and auxiliary ministers
- members of parish liturgy preparation teams, especially the parish priest.

Depending on the role they themselves are playing, their immediate collaboration is with other specialist music ministers:

- the accompanist and/or other musicians
- the cantor and/or song-leader
- the choir director and choir
- the composer.

They need to know the parish community and its demographic and familiarise themselves with the congregation’s existing repertoire and degree of participation, fully aware that different Sunday liturgies may have their own distinct musical character, style and personnel.

They may have to draw on their personal gift for diplomacy to help achieve practical reconciliation between conflicting points of view about styles of liturgical music and particular compositions.
They need to be skilled in the art of persuasion so as to encourage everyone to extend their sung participation in the liturgy.

They need to have the wisdom to know when to introduce new repertoire and when to stay focused on a smaller range of core items.

Active collaboration with the relevant staff members of the parish or regional school is essential for the worthy celebration of Confirmation, First Holy Communion, and regular school or class Masses.

**ORGANISATIONAL EXPERTISE**

Parish music coordinators need to have practical organisational skills. Their tasks may include:

- arranging rosters and scheduling and managing rehearsals
- preparing orders of service and materials for overhead projectors
- ensuring musicians, cantors and choristers have the music they need for any given liturgy
- ensuring that copyright law is fully observed and mandatory reporting is completed
- managing the parish music budget
- investigating and advising on the most appropriate resources for the parish such as musical instruments and hymn books.

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

In company with all liturgical ministers, music coordinators will value annual performance reviews and pertinent opportunities for professional development.

**APPLYING THE EXPERTISE**

In choosing music for liturgy, music coordinators will find the three-fold judgement taken up and developed in *Sing to the Lord* very helpful. It recommends three criteria to guide the one evaluation: musical, liturgical, and pastoral.

**Musical**

Is the proposed item of sufficient quality from a musical point of view? Does it meet proper artistic and technical standards?

**Liturgical**

Is the proposed item liturgically appropriate? Does it respect the structure and function of that element of the liturgy? Does it enhance the text? Is it in harmony with the spirit of the liturgy?

**Pastoral**

The third criterion the worshipping assembly. Would the choice of the proposed item enable the congregation to pray more effectively? Is it within their capabilities? Will it unite and inspire them? [*Sing to the Lord* (2007) 126-36]
SINGING AT MASS

Since parish Sunday Mass is the most regular liturgical celebration that music coordinators are involved in, they will be clear about the hierarchy of choice that it entails. In descending order:

- dialogues between priest or deacon or lector and the assembly, and acclamations, ie the Gospel Acclamation, the Holy, holy, the Memorial Acclamation, the Great Amen
- antiphons and psalms, including the responsorial psalm and the processional chants for the Entrance and Communion
- refrains and related responses, i.e. the Lord, have mercy, the Prayer of the Faithful, the Lamb of God
- hymns, i.e. the Glory to God and supplementary songs for the Preparation of Gifts, after Communion, or as a Recessional [Sing to the Lord (2007) 115]

A PRAYER OF BLESSING

God of glory,
your beloved Son has shown us
that true worship comes from humble and contrite hearts.
Bless our brothers and sisters,
who have responded to the needs of our parish
and wish to commit themselves to your service
as ministers of music.
Grant that their ministry may be fruitful
and our worship pleasing in your sight.
We ask this through Christ our Lord.
R. Amen.
[Book of Blessings 1854]

FOR FURTHER REFERENCE


The Liturgy Documents: Essential Documents for Parish Sacramental Rites and Other Liturgies. 


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1 All the above and many other documents are available in The Liturgy Documents Volume One & Volume Two (see references).
2 Ibid.