

The Role of Music in the Catholic Funeral : Some guidelines

The Catholic Funeral*

Lord for those who believe in your love death is not the end.

The death of a Christian is not the end of life, but rather a transformation in an onward journey towards eternal life with God. We believe that this call to eternal life begins for all Christians in the waters of baptism. Nevertheless for those family and friends who are bereaved there is sadness in parting, and death when it comes, even when it has been expected, such as after a long illness, always leaves a sense of loss and shock. The Catholic Church has over many centuries developed a rich tradition in its liturgy for funerals. The Catholic funeral rites commend the deceased to the mercy of God, and as we give thanks to God for the life of a Christian we pray that God may forgive whatever sins the deceased may have committed through human weakness

Thus, the Catholic funeral is more than a remembrance ceremony, more than an out pouring of grief, and more than a service of thanksgiving for a person. It is all of these and more.

It cannot exist in isolation, but rather is part of our faith journey, as individuals and as a community. As Christians, we are united in grief and in faith: calling on Gods love to guide us in these difficult times.

Ministry of Consolation*



“To console those who are mourning with the hope ... of Christ who is our “life and our resurrection”

As a cantor, musician or organist, you are part of the ministry of consolation to those who have suffered the loss of one whom they love. Your music allows the community to express convictions and feelings that words alone may fail to convey.

It has a power to uplift the mourners, to strengthen the unity of the assembly in faith and love and to create a spirit of hope

The role of Music in the Funeral*

Sing with all the saints in glory

The music at funerals should support, console, and uplift the participants and should help to create in them a spirit of hope in Christ’s victory over death and in the Christian’s share in that victory.

This is the challenge which musicians, celebrants and the bereaved face in preparing to celebrate with dignity the Funeral Rites of a Christian.

Music offers the community a way of expressing convictions and feelings that words alone may fail to convey.



Music has the capacity to uplift those who are mourning and strengthens the assembly in faith and love and create a spirit of hope.

Music chosen for the funeral Mass should primarily be in praise and thanksgiving to God.

Non-liturgical music should not normally be used during the Funeral Mass; if for a particular reason it is, then it should be chosen with great care and should not contradict religious sentiments.

The use of taped music during the celebration of Mass is to be strongly discouraged as it is an intrusion into the celebration of a living worshipping community. As with other aspects of the funeral rites what may be considered fitting in the intimacy of a home may come across as banal in the context of the public liturgy of the Church

(*From ‘*Celebrating the Catholic funeral*’, November 2003. the National Centre for Liturgy, Maynooth)
For more detail see ‘further reading’ on this leaflet

Music for Funerals in the Limerick Diocese

This diocese follows national guidelines for music at funerals.

Music has two valuable roles in the liturgy, and we need to take account of both at all times:

- **Communal:** The active participation of all that gather, in singing together, helps to bond the congregation. Many people may not have even met before today.
- **Personal:** Music/song is meant to draw us into the mystery of God’s love. It’s role in the liturgy is to help us to pray and to recognise Gods presence with us.

Planning

No one should plan a liturgy solo. Consult your priest, make decisions about liturgy as a team, don’t be afraid to say to the family, ‘I’m not sure, I need to check that out’.

If you *are* involved with members of the family in planning sacred music and song for the funeral rites, remember that you are not ‘doing a job’, you are involved in Christian service (i.e. Ministry). You are in a position to explain to the family the meaning and significance of the rites. If you can’t do that, please consider learning - contact the Diocesan Liturgy group c/o LDPC, Denmark St (061 400133) to find out about workshops on liturgy.

Liturgy

Your music should be truly expressive of the texts and at the same time simple and easily sung. Since music can evoke strong feelings, it should be chosen with great sensitivity. If you are thinking of including a piece of non-religious music, it is important that it is in harmony with our faith in the Lord’s death and resurrection and will contribute to the atmosphere of Christian worship. Prayerful silence is also important and can permit the assembly to reflect upon the word of God and the meaning of the celebration.

“Since music can evoke strong feelings, it should be chosen with great sensitivity.”

Music for funerals

Positive choices for our celebration

What can I say if ...

... Music is suggested that is not appropriate for a funeral liturgy?

This music might not be appropriate for the funeral liturgy, but that doesn't mean that it needs to go unheard. It might be more personal and valuable to hear/sing this music:

- In the family home before the body leaves the house
 - In the funeral home before the coffin is closed
 - At the graveside after the prayers
- The family deserves to be informed that they have more choices and opportunities than they think!

... taped music is suggested for the funeral liturgy?

Explain that taped music is appropriate for an audience who observe and are entertained; rather than a united participating congregation. Taped music is not appropriate in a liturgical celebration because good liturgy requires a very personal touch - live music, congregational singing and our heartfelt prayers are most appropriate.

... the bereaved family feels upset because their choices are being challenged?

Most parishes have simple booklets available for bereaved families to help them in planning a funeral, and the funeral liturgy is usually prepared by the celebrant (priest) and family members together. Thus, it is unusual for those who have been involved in preparing the liturgy to have a problem.

Invite those concerned to speak to their priest if clarity is required. Ask all mourners to respect the

Making decisions

The authors of *Music in Catholic Worship* (U.S. guidelines) suggest three criteria for planning music for Catholic liturgies:

• Musical Judgment

Is it good music, able to carry the weight of the text or the emotion that it seeks to evoke? (MCW 26)

• Liturgical Judgment

Is the music appropriate for the nature of the liturgy itself? Is the piece appropriate for the part of the liturgy it is being considered for? (MCW, 30)

• Pastoral Judgment

Does this choice of music enable the assembly to express its faith in this place, time and culture? (MCW 39)

Songs need to be within the capabilities of this assembly to sing and these musicians to play. The texts of the music must be theologically sound, expressing the faith of the Church. Special care should be taken for funeral liturgies to choose texts that express a belief in resurrection and the Church's ministry of consolation and hope.

Further Reading and resources

National guidelines

National centre for liturgy, Maynooth.

See: www.liturgy-ireland.ie OR subscribe to 'New Liturgy', the Bulletin of the National Secretariat Irish Episcopal Commission for Liturgy (Tel: +353 1 7083478, email: liturgy@may.ie)

Some other diocese' guidelines referenced in this leaflet:

Dublin: <http://litmus.dublindiocese.ie/>

Kerry: <http://www.dioceseofkerry.ie/>

US Bishops: Music for Catholic Worship.
www.usccb.org/liturgy/current/musiccathworship.shtml

**These guidelines were approved by:
Bishop Donal Murray, Diocese of Limerick
In June 2007**

**Also: Limerick diocesan Liturgy group
Limerick diocesan Pastoral Council
Limerick diocesan Council of Priests**

The Catholic Diocese of Limerick

Compiled by the Diocesan Liturgy group

By the rivers of Babylon
we sat and wept ... How
can we sing the songs of
the Lord (*Psalms 137*)

The role of Music in the Catholic Funeral Rite



*Guidelines for all professionals
and parish groups who serve the
bereaved*