

Music Ministry Handbook 2022-2023

St. Alphonsus Catholic Church

Brooklyn Center MN



~ Introduction~

Dear Music Ministers:

I want to share with you some of the general practices that will guide us in our ministry at St Alphonsus. We want to be equally prepared and competent as we fulfill our roles as music ministers (Cantor, Accompanists, Choir Conductor, etc). Being a Music Minister requires full active conscious participation. You must have the will to practice regularly and the ability to effectively proclaim the Sacred Scripture and lead the congregation in song. To be a Music Minister requires a certain requisite level of competency. It is more than just showing up to sing for Mass.

I found an article by Alexis Kutarna, Professor of Liturgy at the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Texas. She offers us a wonderful explanation of the theological principles behind music, cantoring and choirs.

What is the Role of a Cantor? Of a Music Minister in general? To lead the congregation in worship

“The role of the cantor is to lead the people of God in “singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs” in liturgical worship...at the same time a singer as well as leader of the congregation in singing.”

“Singing is one of the means of actively, or actually, participating in the liturgy, and one of the essential sacramental signs with which the liturgy is woven....The significance of the song of the Liturgy is not found in the music...but in the relationship of music to the sacred text.”

Why do we sing? Why not just instrumental music or recited text? Our voice is the most important gift we bring to Sunday Mass.

“The voice, carried on the breath, is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. The sound of the voice is a symbol of the breath of life, just as the breath that God breathed into Adam to give him life. (Gen 2:7) It is the breath of Jesus upon his apostles after his Resurrection when he greeted them, “Peace be with you,” and he breathed on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. (John 20:21) We hear St. Augustine tell us: “Singing is for the one who loves.” And further, “the song of the Church is a symbol of love, the dialogue of love between three persons of the Trinity, united in one love-song.”

In the end, the main goal of music ministry is to support the congregation, and through the music we teach and guide them into a deeper relationship within their own faith journey. This can only be done with our individual **full active conscious participation**. This is how we help them, as they are lost within the liturgy without us.

For more information I strongly suggested “Sing to the Lord: Music in Divine Worship”, of a 2007 document by the Bishops of the United States. Chapter 1 “Why we Sing” delves into the importance of song and how it assists participation in the liturgy.

General Norms for Liturgical Musicians

The following norms apply mainly to the roles of cantor and choir conductors, but are important to remember for the accompanist and choir as well.

Leading and Amplification

The first norm is that the singers are members of the congregation. This means, when possible, you should sing all congregational music away from the microphone. We should hear the voice of the congregation singing, and not an amplified voice through the sound system. If the congregation is not fulfilling its role in singing, the cantor should then help lead using a strong voice and electronic amplification as necessary. Judicious discretion is advised and needs to be made at the moment by the cantor. The US Bishops publication, *Sing to the Lord* reminds us:

As a leader of congregational song, the cantor should take part in singing with the entire gathered assembly. In order to promote the singing of the liturgical assembly, the cantor's voice should not be heard above the congregation. As a transitional practice, the voice of the cantor might need to be amplified to stimulate and lead congregational singing when this is still weak. However, as the congregation finds its voice and sings with increasing confidence, the cantor's voice should correspondingly recede. At times, it may be appropriate to use a modest gesture that invites participation and clearly indicates when the congregation is to begin, but gestures should be used sparingly and only when genuinely needed. (§38)

This might mean that for some music you are not using the microphone at all; at other times, you may be stepping closer to/further from the microphone as needed.

Psalms

In collaboration with the accompanist, the cantor should set the tempo and phrasing of the psalm, especially the verses, which they typically sing alone. It is important to remember for chanted psalm-tones, that the text dictates the flow of the rhythm. A good way to begin analyzing how you might sing it is to follow the punctuation. What this means in practice is that the cantor should NOT wait for a chord at the beginning of each phrase of the psalm tone, but rather, should sing the text as if it were spoken. The accompanist will follow and place the chord changes

on stressed syllables throughout the verse. This means that each verse could be phrased differently.

Solos

From time to time, the cantor may also be called upon to provide preludes and/or solos during the liturgy. These need to be approved by the Director of Music for liturgical appropriateness and licensing reasons. It must be remembered that music is a servant to the liturgy. We do not perform ANY music for the sake of performance, but rather to give glory to God.

Practice vs. Rehearsal

As a cantor, you are expected to practice assigned music on your own. However, the Director of Music is always willing to help you on an individual basis as needed. There is a difference though, between practice and rehearsal. **Practice** is what you do on your own. **Rehearsal** is when you come (well-practiced) to “run” the music with the accompanist or director.



General Expectations for a Scheduled Mass

The Following is a general guideline of the expectations of the Cantor, Accompanist, and Choir Conductor for a Scheduled Service.

- Dress Appropriately. Business Casual is appropriate for most celebrations.

- All Music ministers should arrive at least 1 hour prior to Mass unless otherwise indicated by the Music Director. Arriving early is especially important if you know that you need to run certain music with the accompaniment.

- Come to Mass prepared with your music in order ready to sing/play. Instrumentalists should arrive early to set up and allow time to tune. Please note that the hour before mass is not a practice time. A quick rehearsal and warm up is accounted for in timing, but this time is mainly for set up and sound checks.

- Sound checks are expected to be done at least 30 minutes before the start of Mass.

- Cantors and Choir Conductors are expected to quickly meet and discuss with the scheduled Minister 15 minutes before Mass Time to clarify any changes to the Mass (extra collection, additional prayer, prelude, etc)

- Remember that you are in full view of the entire assembly. Avoid excessive movement or talking during Mass as it is distracting to the congregation. Be attentive to the liturgy. Music Ministers should participate fully and enthusiastically throughout the Mass.

- Music Ministers are expected to always be listening to the singing of the congregation. Music Ministers are meant to encourage the congregation's musical participation. This means that once the congregation is singing fully, the vocal amplification is no longer necessary.

As the Music Director, I hold many responsibilities. My main focus is to assist, support, and teach you as Music Ministers. My role is to give you the tools to succeed in your ministry and deepen your relationship with your faith. This does not mean that I will do everything for you, but instead teach you the necessary skills needed to perform your role within the Music Ministry Team.

Music Director: Kelly Dudley (musicministry@mystals.org / Work Phone: 763-503-3388 / Emergency Phone:)

- Acts as a contact person between Pastor and Music Ministers
- Makes song/hymn selections for each Mass, appropriate to the parts of the Mass and Liturgical season and sends it to the Music Ministers
- Sets the schedule for Cantors/Accompanists at Weekly Services
- Provides Music to Cantors, Accompanists, and Choir Conductors
- Maintains a current contact list of Music Ministers
- Collaborates with Choir Conductors
- Leads the Adult Choir

The following are the specific roles of each position within the Music Ministry team, and the general expectations of each position. If you need assistance on fulfilling these duties please contact me directly and I will be happy to teach you the necessary skills. Please remember in our goal of **full active conscious participation** we aim to guide, teach, and support the congregation in their prayer and faith journey during the liturgy.

Role of the Cantor:

The role of the cantor is to lead the people of God in "Singing Psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs" in liturgical worship. They at the same time are a singer as well as leader of the congregation in singing.

Duties and Responsibilities:

- A cantor needs to have a basic knowledge of music, for example base notes and rhythm.
- A cantor is able to sing with proper intonation (in tune) with a pleasing and confident tone, and with a steady rhythm.
- Cantors dedicate personal time to practice the scheduled music. Private rehearsals can be scheduled with the Director of Music as needed. Cantors are expected to meet with the scheduled accompanist one hour prior to mass time to quickly rehearse and discuss any trouble spots within the music.
- Cantors are liturgical ministers so they have a basic understanding how the liturgy works, what parts are sung and why. They need to know the liturgical seasons and the parts of the Mass unique to each season so they can make appropriate and informed choices.
- Cantors are leaders of sung worship. The congregation depends on them for guidance in the liturgy.
- As a cantor you work collaboratively with the accompanist, choir directors, and music director
- A cantor needs a working knowledge of the equipment used for liturgy (microphones and sound system)
- Cantor teaches the congregation new music, by thoroughly knowing the song and text, be able to help develop congregational singing.
- Be sensitive to communal prayer and not intrude. Full active conscious participation is required (cell phones off and away, paying attention to the homily, etc)

Role of the Accompanist:

The role of the piano/organ accompanist is to provide support to the cantor or choir through accompaniment on the piano or another keyboard instrument.

Duties and Responsibilities:

- Demonstrates strong piano skills as a soloist and accompanist
- Works collaboratively with the choir, choir directors, and music director
- Accompanies ensembles and soloists in a variety of settings (eg. rehearsals, concerts, masses) for the purpose of ensuring musical support for the music ministers and congregation.
- Analyzes and learns multiple pieces of the assigned music for the liturgical season and prior to rehearsals and performances for the purpose of enhancing the Music Program and ensuring efficient use of rehearsal time and performance schedules
- Attends a rehearsal one hour prior to Mass time to assist the choir or cantor with a warm up, or quickly run a piece.
- Consistent professional interaction with the Music Director, Music Ministers, Sound Technicians, Liturgical Ministers, etc, for the purpose of serving as a model for musical productions.

*Note: Accompanists are not required to teach, direct, or conduct ensembles, cantors, and choir conductors.

Role of the Choir Conductor (for individual choirs):

The Role of the Choir Conductor is to work with the Music Director to conduct, rehearse, and manage their choir to form their active participation and leadership role in the scheduled Sunday worship services and other services as required.

Duties and Responsibilities:

- The Choir conductor shall select all solo choral pieces to be sung by the choir. Music should be appropriate for use in the liturgical service and, if possible, follow the theme or the lessons appointed for the day. Music selections shall be made in consultation with the Music Director. The music director needs to know the music a month before so copyright information can be secured. It is illegal for us to use copyright music without permission.
- Choir Conductors are expected to learn, teach, and conduct all scheduled music for the scheduled Worship Service, so that the choir is comfortable leading the congregation in sung prayer.
- Choir Conductors are also liturgical ministers and are expected to have a thorough understanding of the Liturgy for which they are assigned. They are to know the cycle of the liturgical seasons and the parts of the Mass unique to each season; and be able to make appropriate and informed choices.
- Choir Conductors need to understand copyright and licensing laws regarding sheet music and live streaming allowances.
- Choir Conductors are expected to have a general understanding of the sound equipment, as to direct the sound technician on scheduled masses.
- All hymns shall be sung under the direction of the Choir Conductor at services. Soloists for the Psalms and other pieces are expected to be determined by the Choir Conductor for their scheduled Mass. Tempos, entrances, and cut offs should be given to the accompanists as well as the choir well in advance of the scheduled service.
- The conductor is expected to be responsible for the choir's appearance, sound, and delivery
- It is expected that the choir will rehearse on a weekly basis, and the Conductor will submit a rehearsal schedule to the Music Director before the Liturgical Season to confirm room availability.

- At times the music director will assemble special choirs for important parish events, (Christmas/Easter/Pentecost). The Choir Conductor is expected to encourage all members of the choir to participate in special occasion choirs (Christmas/Easter/Pentecost) regardless of if they are the conductor or not. It is strongly encouraged that the Choir Conductor also joins in these choirs as a chorister.
- The Choir conductor is expected to work with the Music Director in programs for teaching the music of the liturgy and hymns to the congregation at large
- The choir conductor is expected to purchase music and music supplies for their choir. All expenditures shall be under the budgetary control of the Music Director. It is expected that any invoices will be submitted to the Music Director as soon as possible after the purchases.
- The Choir conductor is expected to perform the duties of the position in a cordial and cooperative manner with the Music Director, other Music Ministers, members of the sound department, and the choir.
- The Choir Conductor is expected to submit a roster of participating members to the Music Director, so that all members of the choir can be equally informed of changes and events within the Music Ministry Team.

Role of the Choir:

There are four functions to explain why the church choir exists and to help determine the programmatic choices that our music ministry makes. Following these 4 functions makes the choir a conduit of faith for themselves and the congregation. Most importantly, these four functions can enliven your congregation's singing through the faithful discipleship of your church choir members.

1. The church choir leads and enlivens the congregation's song.

Let's not forget that without a congregation, there could not be a church choir! But why is it important that the congregation's song be supported, instead of just focusing on the church choir's musical success? When we take words and put them to music, it becomes part of who we are. Therefore, it becomes imperative that we put as much of the Word into the congregation as possible. If the congregation can sing it, but we don't let them, we miss an opportunity to transform people's lives in the most direct way possible. By giving the congregation new singing skills and confidence, we empower them for the rest of their lives to better embody God's Word through music. The choir are active leaders in building up the congregation's song.

2. The church choir sings music that the congregation cannot.

There's lots of great music that needs to be sung that just cannot reasonably be done by a congregation because it's too complex to be done without extensive rehearsal. There are some texts set to challenging music that congregations need to hear, whether it's because it is comforting in times of crises, praising in times of joy, or inspiring in times of apathy. By spending the time and effort to rehearse each week, the choir provides a great service to the congregation by opening up the amount of literature the congregation can be exposed to. Used appropriately, this has significant theological and musical implications, broadening the congregation's experience of the divine.

3. The church choir serves as a small-group within the church for faith formation.

When we sing together, a bond is created that unites us unlike any other activity. In a church setting, this function can be intentionally formed and nurtured. Because we meet together once a week to do work for the Glory of God and benefit our neighbor, taking care of each other is no longer an option; it's a responsibility.

4. The church choir sings beautiful and challenging music to praise God and edify the congregation.

This is where the majority of our rehearsal time is taken up, because singing challenging music beautifully is difficult to do and takes lots of practice. It is important that when we sing, we sing beautifully, because it touches people's souls. The reason that we work so hard to create beautiful music together is so that we can glorify God and help people experience a holy moment. On the opposite end of the spectrum, it is important that our singing is not outrageously bad because it can be distracting and therefore prevent people from having a holy moment.

It is important, however, that the first three priorities are not forgotten when trying to achieve our most beautiful sounds. A church choir's job is not just to sing beautifully, but rather it is to minister to the congregation and to each other in a variety of ways, helping to change the world into a more loving and peaceful place.

I hope that this handbook clarifies the roles and responsibilities of each member of our Music Ministry Team. Remember our goal is to support the congregation, and through the music teach and guide them into a deeper relationship within their own faith journey. This can only be done with our individual **full active conscious participation**. This is how we help them, as they are lost within the liturgy without us.

God of all creation, we thank you today for your gift of musicians. WE know that every good and perfect gift comes from you. We thank you for the custodians of the music of the divine service. We thank you for string instruments, wind instruments, percussion and singers. Lord God, we ask that you bless all who guide through the ministry of music worship. May musicians facilitate music that brings you glory. Music that transcends barriers that divide race, class, gender, denominationalism, ethnicity or geography. May their gifts create the atmosphere that lifts you up, for you said "If you be lifted up from the earth you will draw all people unto you" We celebrate musicians for the healers that they are. Providing light and renewal to their soul.

Lord God, gracious and merciful, we pray for their strength, and the strength of their families and loved ones. We ask that you continue to cause them to create and share the gift of music through instrument and voice. May they find joy in their work and may it fill them with peace, comfort and purpose. Fill musicians with your light and love as they generously share with the world. Lord let all creation sing your praise and the host make music in your presence. Bless musicians as only you can.

Amen