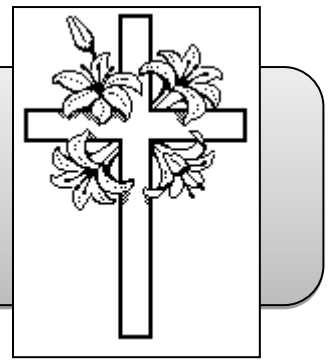


Music and the Funeral Rites:

Sharing in a Ministry of Consolation and Hope
Kildare and Leighlin Faith Development Services, November 2013



The following material is based on the statement by the Irish Bishops' Conference 'Celebrating a Catholic Funeral', issued in November 2003.

Celebrating the Death of a Christian:

When Christians die, the Church intercedes on their behalf, confident that 'life is changed, not ended'. The Church also ministers to the sorrowing and consoles them in the funeral rites with the comforting word of God and the Eucharist.

The *Order of Christian Funerals* is the ritual book used by the Catholic Church when a Christian dies. It contains many prayers and rituals. These rituals console those who are mourning with the hope in the person of Christ who is our life and our resurrection.

The Power of Music in the Funeral Rites:

In the *Order of Christian Funerals* we find the following: 'Music is integral to the funeral rites. It allows the community to express convictions and feelings that words alone may fail to convey. It has the power to console and uplift the mourners and to strengthen the unity of the assembly in faith and love.' (OCF 30)

This calls for great sensitivity on the part of the music minister. The music should not add to the burden of grief but, rather, should convey the comfort, hope and consolation of faith to those who grieve while uniting those who gather to celebrate these rites.

The Task of Music in the Funeral Rites:

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.' (OCF 31)

This is the challenge which the music minister, the celebrants and mourners face in preparing to celebrate with dignity the Funeral rites of a Christian.

The texts of the songs chosen for the funeral rite should express Christian belief in the resurrection and be related to Scripture. (OCF30) Many musical settings used by the parish community during the liturgical year may be suitable for use at funerals. (OCF 32)

The Role of the Music Minister:

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. *As a music minister you are called to lead the sung prayer of the liturgy with understanding, conviction and reverence.*

As in other liturgies a primary task of music ministers will be to 'assist the assembly's full participation in singing the songs, responses and acclamations to these rites'. (OCF 33).

Planning Music with Reverence and Sensitivity:

Take care to exercise your ministry of consolation in a reverent way, always keeping in mind the life of the deceased and the circumstances of death. You may well be in a position to explain to the family the meaning and significance of the rites and, in light of that, the appropriateness or otherwise of music choices. Seek out opportunities to learn more about the liturgy and music.

If families have particular requests it is important to listen to them. Giving families correct information about the role of music and the places for music will help them to make good decisions in conjunction with the parish.

Sometimes a piece of music might not be appropriate for the funeral liturgy but that doesn't mean that it needs to go unheard. There are places outside of the funeral rites when secular music might be used. For example, 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.

Normally non-liturgical music should not be used during the funeral Mass. If for a particular reason it is, then it should be chosen with great care and should be in harmony with our faith in the Lord's death and resurrection and contribute to the atmosphere of Christian worship.

Making Decisions

Music ministers might employ these criteria when selecting music for a particular ritual:

- **Liturgical Judgement:** Is the music appropriate for the nature of this liturgy itself? Is the piece of music appropriate for the particular part of the liturgy it is being considered for, i.e. the psalm, communion procession, entrance...?
- **Musical Judgement:** Is it good music, capable of bearing the weight of the text or the emotion that it seeks to evoke?
- **Pastoral Judgement:** Does this choice of music enable this gathering of people, this assembly to express its faith in this place, time and culture? (Adapted from *Music in Catholic Worship*, US)

Musical Priorities

The musical priorities for funeral rites are consistent with those of any liturgy:

1. Gospel Acclamation and, in the case of Mass, the Memorial Acclamation, Holy, Holy and Amen.
2. The Psalm
3. Opening Hymn, communion hymn, Lamb of God, Lord have mercy, recessional hymn.

The Funeral Rites

The funeral rites are comprised of a number of different but connected liturgies. The ones we are most familiar with in Ireland are:

- THE RECEPTION OF THE BODY AT CHURCH
- THE FUNERAL MASS WITH THE FINAL COMMENDATION AND FAREWELL

Rite of Reception

Music is possible in the following points in this simple liturgy:

Entrance Procession with Song The song should continue until all who have gathered are in their places. Instrumental music can continue during the placing of Christian symbols.

The Responsorial Psalm is sung after the First Reading. The psalm enables the community to respond in faith to the reading, to express its grief and to praise God. There are many appropriate psalm settings.

Gospel Acclamation Rather than being out of keeping with the spirit of a funeral liturgy, the Alleluia is a powerful reminder of Easter joy in the resurrection which is the source of our hope at this time.

The litany or prayer of intercession is sung after the homily. It contains a "Lord have mercy" response. Music ministers may wish a Penitential Rite setting with which the congregation is familiar.

A **Hymn to Mary** may be appropriate during the Concluding Rite according to local custom while the use of *instrumental music* as people offer their sympathies is always appreciated and contributes to the warmth of the service.

The Funeral Mass

As noted already, the choice of music and musical priorities at a funeral Mass follows the usual guidelines for any Eucharistic celebration.

Entrance Hymn that all the assembly can sing, uniting them as one voice in sung prayer.

The Psalm The simpler the response the more it allows people to respond without difficulty. It is important not to substitute other songs in place of the psalm at this time in the liturgy. Just because a piece may have a repeated refrain, this does not make it a psalm, e.g. The Clouds Veil.

The Gospel Acclamation Remember that this acclamation changes in the Lenten season.

Presentation of the Gifts Instrumental music is most suitable at this point and should continue until after the gifts have been incensed.

Eucharistic Prayer Acclamations: Holy, Holy, Memorial Acclamation & the Amen Choose a familiar, easily sung, parish setting.

The Lord's prayer should only ever be sung when all can do so. It is the one prayer that unites all Christians.

Communion hymns ideally should reflect the action that is taking place, i.e. the common procession of people, each coming forward to receive the Body of Christ, that they may be individually nourished and thus strengthen the bond of community.

Song of Farewell may be sung after the coffin has been sprinkled and incensed.

Procession to the place of committal This is a powerful moment in the liturgy when the sung music can support in faith the final journey of the grieving with their loved one.

During the funeral rites the Church on earth unites with the Church in heaven to offer worship, praise and thanksgiving to God for the gift of a life which has now been returned to God, the author of life. The funeral rites also bring hope and consolation to the living.

Music Planning Sheet for Funeral Rites:

Rite of Reception:

Entrance Procession Song: _____

*Psalm: _____

*Gospel Acclamation: _____

Litany response: _____

Other: _____

Funeral Mass

Opening Song: _____

*Psalm: _____

*Gospel Acclamation: _____

Presentation of the Gifts: _____

*Acclamations for
Eucharistic Prayer (Setting): _____

Communion Hymn: _____

Song of Farewell: _____

Procession to the place
of Committal: _____